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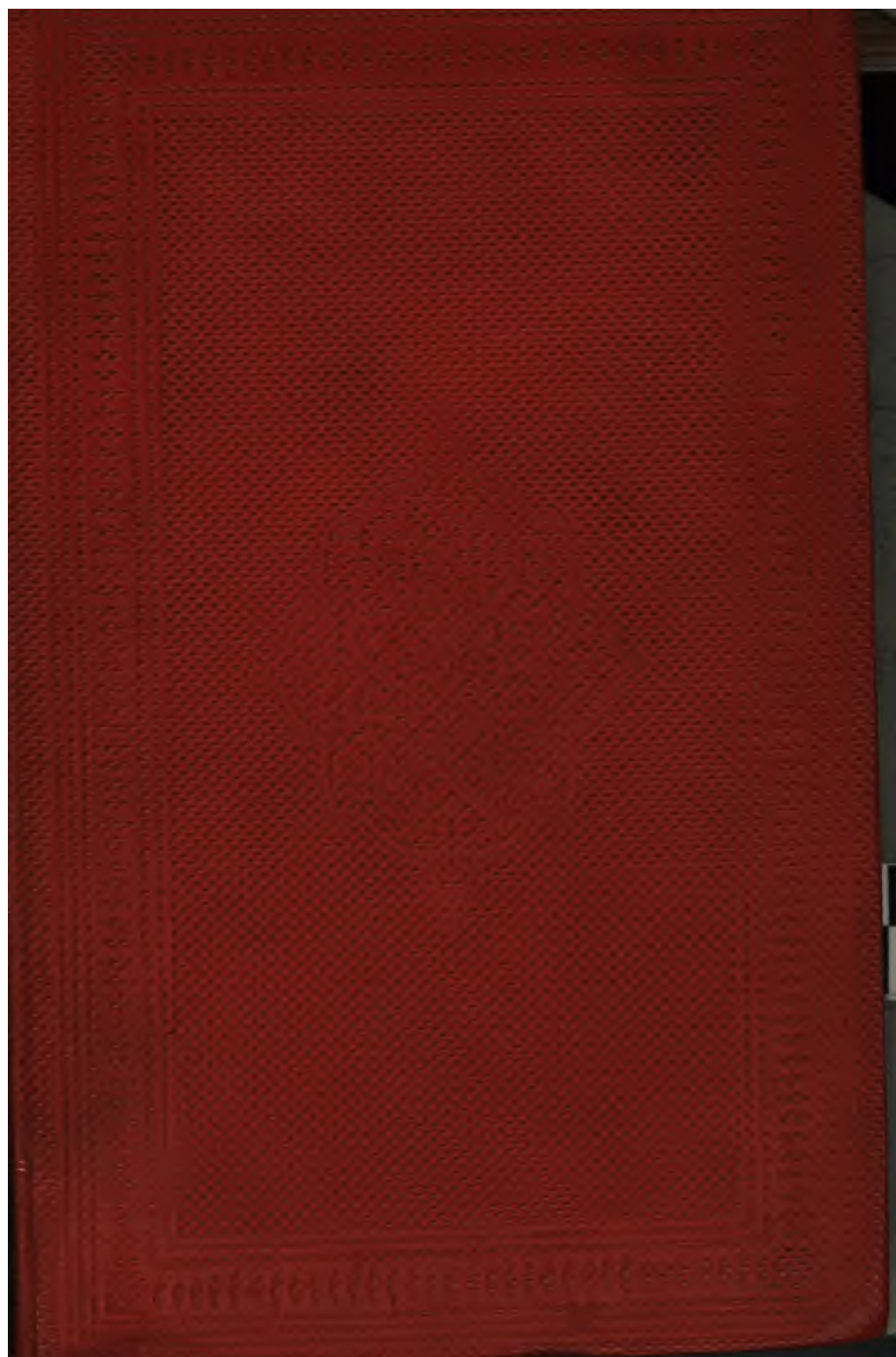
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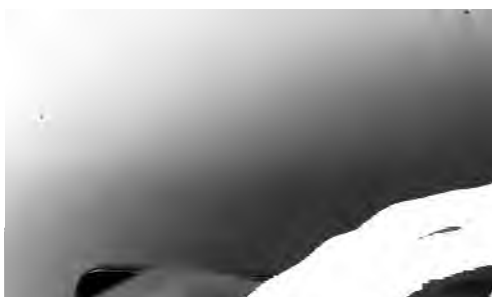
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RIGHT AT LAST,

AND OTHER TALES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Mary Barton," "Life of Charlotte Brontë," "Round the Sofa,"
&c. &c.

LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, SON & CO., 47 LUDGATE HILL.

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PREFACE.

THESE Tales have already appeared in "Household Words" and "All the Year Round." They are now, by Mr. Dickens's kind permission, reprinted, at the instance of the Publishers, who offered satisfactory reasons for such a course ; and the writer can only hope that they will find a sufficient number of friends to prove that they were not altogether mistaken.

Manchester, April, 1860.

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RIGHT AT LAST.

DOCTOR BROWN was poor, and had to make his way in the world. He had gone to study his profession in Edinburgh, and his energy, ability, and good conduct had entitled him to some notice on the part of the professors. Once introduced to the ladies of their families, his prepossessing appearance and pleasing manners made him a universal favourite, and perhaps no other student received so many invitations to dances and evening parties, or was so often singled out to fill up an odd vacancy at the last moment at the dinner-table. No one knew particularly who he was, or where he sprang from ; but then he had no near relations, as he had once or twice observed ; so he was evidently not hampered with low-born or low-bred

connections. He had been in mourning for his mother when he first came to college.

All this much was recalled to the recollection of Professor Frazer by his niece Margaret, as she stood before him one morning in his study, telling him, in a low, but resolute voice, that the night before Doctor James Brown had offered her marriage—that she had accepted him,—and that he was intending to call on Professor Frazer (her uncle and natural guardian) that very morning, to obtain his consent to their engagement. Professor Frazer was perfectly aware, from Margaret's manner, that his consent was regarded by her as a mere form, for that her mind was made up: and he had more than once had occasion to find out how inflexible she could be. Yet he too was of the same blood, and held to his own opinions in the same obdurate manner. The consequence of which frequently was, that uncle and niece had argued themselves into mutual bitterness of feeling, without altering each other's opinions one jot. But Professor Frazer could not restrain himself on this occasion of all others.

“Then, Margaret, you will just quietly settle down to be a beggar, for that lad Brown has little or no money to think of marrying upon: you that might be my Lady Kennedy, if you would.”

"I could not, uncle."

"Nonsense, child. Sir Alexander is a personable and agreeable man,—middle aged, if you will—well, a wilful woman maun have her way; but if I had had a notion that this youngster was sneaking into my house to cajole you into fancying him, I would have seen him far enough before I had ever let your aunt invite him to dinner. Ay! you may mutter; but I say no gentleman would ever have come into my house to seduce my niece's affections, without first informing me of his intentions, and asking my leave."

"Doctor Brown is a gentleman, Uncle Frazer, whatever you may think of him."

"So you think—so you think. But who cares for the opinion of a love-sick girl? He is a handsome, plausible young fellow, of good address. And I don't mean to deny his ability. But there is something about him I never did like, and now it's accounted for. And Sir Alexander— Well, well! your aunt will be disappointed in you, Margaret. But you were always a headstrong girl. Has this Jamie Brown ever told you who or what his parents were, or where he comes from? I don't ask about his forbears, for he does not look like a lad who has ever had ancestors: and you a Frazer of Lovat! Fie, for shame, Margaret! Who is this Jamie Brown?"

"He is James Brown, Doctor of Medicine of the University of Edinburgh: a good, clever young man, whom I love with my whole heart," replied Margaret, reddening.

"Hoot! is that the way for a maiden to speak? Where does he come from? Who are his kinsfolk? Unless he can give a pretty good account of his family and prospects, I shall just bid him begone, Margaret, and that I tell you fairly."

"Uncle" (her eyes were filling with hot indignant tears), "I am of age; you know he is good and clever; else why have you had him so often to your house? I marry him, and not his kinsfolk. He is an orphan. I doubt if he has any relations that he keeps up with. He has no brothers nor sisters. I don't care where he comes from."

"What was his father?" asked Professor Frazer, coldly.

"I don't know. Why should I go prying into every particular of his family, and asking who his father was, and what was the maiden name of his mother, and when his grandmother was married?"

"Yet, I think I have heard Miss Margaret Frazer speak up pretty strongly in favour of a long line of unspotted ancestry."

"I had forgotten our own, I suppose, when I spoke

so. Simon Lord Lovat is a creditable great-uncle to the Frazers! If all tales be true, he ought to have been hanged for a felon, instead of beheaded like a loyal gentleman."

"O! if you're determined to foul your own nest, I have done. Let James Brown come in; I will make him my bow, and thank him for condescending to marry a Frazer."

"Uncle," said Margaret, now fairly crying, "don't let us part in anger. We love each other in our hearts. You have been good to me, and so has my aunt. But I have given my word to Doctor Brown, and I must keep it. I should love him if he was the son of a ploughman. We don't expect to be rich; but he has a few hundreds to start with, and I have my own hundred a year—"

"Well, well, child, don't cry. You have settled it all for yourself, it seems; so I wash my hands of it. I shake off all responsibility. You will tell your aunt what arrangements you make with Doctor Brown about your marriage, and I will do what you wish in the matter. But don't send the young man in to me to ask my consent. I neither give it nor withhold it. It would have been different if it had been Sir Alexander."

"O! Uncle Frazer, don't speak so. See Dr. Brown,

and at any rate—for my sake—tell him you consent. Let me belong to you that much. It seems so desolate at such a time, to have to dispose of myself as if nobody owned or cared for me.”

The door was thrown open, and Doctor James Brown was announced. Margaret hastened away; and, before he was aware, the Professor had given a sort of consent, without asking a question of the happy young man, who hurried away to seek his betrothed; leaving her uncle muttering to himself.

Both Doctor and Mrs. Frazer were so strongly opposed to Margaret's engagement, in reality, that they could not help showing it by manner and implication; although they had the grace to keep silent. But Margaret felt even more keenly than her lover that he was not welcome in the house. Her pleasure in seeing him was destroyed by her sense of the coldness with which he was received; and she willingly yielded to his desire of a short engagement; which was contrary to their original plan of waiting until he should be settled in practice in London, and should see his way clear to such an income as would render their marriage a prudent step. Doctor and Mrs. Frazer neither objected nor approved. Margaret would rather have had the most vehement opposition than this icy coldness. But it made her turn with redoubled affec-

tion to her warm-hearted and sympathizing lover. Not that she had ever discussed her uncle and aunt's behaviour with him. As long as he was apparently unaware of it, she would not awaken him to a sense of it. Besides, they had stood to her so long in the relation of parents, that she felt she had no right to bring in a stranger to sit in judgment upon them.

So it was with rather a heavy heart that she arranged their future ménage with Doctor Brown ; unable to profit by her aunt's experience and wisdom. But Margaret herself was a prudent and sensible girl. Although accustomed to a degree of comfort in her uncle's house that almost amounted to luxury, she could resolutely dispense with it when occasion required. When Doctor Brown started for London, to seek and prepare their new home, she enjoined him not to make any but the most necessary preparations for her reception. She would herself superintend all that was wanting when she came. He had some old furniture, stored up in a warehouse, which had been his mother's. He proposed selling it, and buying new in its place. Margaret persuaded him not to do this ; but to make it go as far as it could. The household of the newly-married couple was to consist of a Scotch-woman long connected with the Frazer family, who was to be the sole female servant ; and of a man whom

Doctor Brown picked up in London, soon after he had fixed on a house,—a man named Crawford, who had lived for many years with a gentleman now gone abroad, but who gave him the most excellent character, in reply to Doctor Brown's inquiries. This gentleman had employed Crawford in a number of ways; so that in fact he was a kind of Jack-of-all-trades; and Doctor Brown, in every letter to Margaret, had some new accomplishment of his servant's to relate, which he did with the more fulness and zest, because Margaret had slightly questioned the wisdom of starting in life with a man-servant; but had yielded to Doctor Brown's arguments on the necessity of keeping up a respectable appearance, making a decent show, &c., to any one who might be inclined to consult him, but be daunted by the appearance of old Christie out of the kitchen, and unwilling to leave a message with one who spoke such unintelligible English. Crawford was so good a carpenter that he could put up shelves, adjust faulty hinges, mend locks, and even went the length of constructing a box out of some old boards that had once formed a packing-case. Crawford one day, when his master was too busy to go out for his dinner, improvised an omelette as good as any Doctor Brown had ever tasted in Paris, when he was studying there. In short, Crawford was a kind of

Admirable Crichton in his way, and Margaret was quite convinced that Doctor Brown was right in his decision that they must have a man-servant; even before she was respectfully greeted by Crawford as he opened the door to the newly-married couple, when they came to their new home after their short wedding tour.

Doctor Brown was rather afraid lest Margaret should think the house bare and cheerless in its half-furnished state; for he had obeyed her injunctions and bought as little furniture as might be, in addition to the few things he had inherited from his mother. His consulting-room (how grand it sounded!) was completely arranged, ready for stray patients; and it was well calculated to make a good impression on them. There was a Turkey carpet on the floor, that had been his mother's, and was just sufficiently worn to give it the air of respectability which handsome pieces of furniture have, when they look as if they had not just been purchased for the occasion, but are in some degree hereditary. The same appearance pervaded the room: the library-table (bought second-hand, it must be confessed), the bureau—that had been his mother's—the leather chairs (as hereditary as the library-table), the shelves Crawford had put up for Doctor Brown's medical books, a good

engraving or two on the walls, gave altogether so pleasant an aspect to the apartment that both Doctor and Mrs. Brown thought, for that evening at any rate, that poverty was just as comfortable a thing as riches. Crawford had ventured to take the liberty of placing a few flowers about the room, as his humble way of welcoming his mistress—late autumn flowers, blending the idea of summer with that of winter suggested by the bright little fire in the grate. Christie sent up delicious scones for tea ; and Mrs. Frazer had made up for her want of geniality as well as she could by a store of marmalade and mutton hams. Doctor Brown could not be easy even in this comfort until he had shown Margaret, almost with a groan, how many rooms were as yet unfurnished,—how much remained to be done. But she laughed at his alarm, lest she should be disappointed in her new home ; declared that she should like nothing better than planning and contriving ; that, what with her own talent for upholstery and Crawford's for joinery, the rooms should be furnished as if by magic, and no bills—the usual consequences of comfort—be forthcoming. But with the morning and daylight Doctor Brown's anxiety returned. He saw and felt every crack in the ceiling, every spot on the paper, not for himself, but for Margaret. He was constantly in his own

mind, as it seemed, comparing the home he had brought her to, with the one she had left. He seemed constantly afraid lest she had repented, or would repent having married him. This morbid restlessness was the only drawback to their great happiness; and, to do away with it, Margaret was led into expenses much beyond her original intention. She bought this article in preference to that because her husband, if he went shopping with her, seemed so miserable if he suspected that she denied herself the slightest wish on the score of economy. She learnt to avoid taking him out with her when she went to make her purchases, as it was a very simple thing to her to choose the least expensive thing, even though it were the ugliest, when she was by herself, but not a simple painless thing to harden her heart to his look of mortification when she quietly said to the shopman that she could not afford this or that. On coming out of a shop after one of these occasions, he had said —

“O, Margaret, I ought not to have married you. You must forgive me—I have so loved you.”

“Forgive you, James!” said she. “For making me so happy! What should make you think I care so much for rep in preference to moreen? Don’t speak so again, please.”

“O, Margaret! but don’t forget how I ask you to forgive me.”

Crawford was everything that he had promised to be, and more than could be desired. He was Margaret’s right hand in all her little household plans, in a way which irritated Christie not a little. This feud between Christie and Crawford was indeed the greatest discomfort in the household. Crawford was silently triumphant in his superior knowledge of London, in his favour up stairs, in his power of assisting his mistress, and in the consequent privilege of being frequently consulted. Christie was for ever regretting Scotland, and hinting at Margaret’s neglect of one who had followed her fortunes into a strange country, to make a favourite of a stranger, and one who was none so good as he ought to be, as she would sometimes affirm. But, as she never brought any proof of her vague accusations, Margaret did not choose to question her, but set them down to a jealousy of her fellow-servant, which the mistress did all in her power to heal. On the whole, however, the four people forming this family lived together in tolerable harmony. Doctor Brown was more than satisfied with his house, his servants, his professional prospects, and most of all with his little bright energetic wife. Margaret, from time to time, was taken by surprise by certain moods

of her husband's; but the tendency of these moods was not to weaken her affection, rather to call out a feeling of pity for what appeared to her morbid sufferings and suspicions—a pity ready to be turned into sympathy, as soon as she could discover any definite cause for his occasional depression of spirits. Christie did not pretend to like Crawford; but, as Margaret quietly declined to listen to her grumblings and discontent on this head, and as Crawford himself was almost painfully solicitous to gain the good opinion of the old Scotch woman, there was no open rupture between them. On the whole, the popular, successful Doctor Brown was apparently the most anxious person in his family. There could be no great cause for this as regarded his money affairs. By one of those lucky accidents which sometimes lift a man up out of his struggles, and carry him on to smooth unencumbered ground, he made a great step in his professional progress, and their income from this source was likely to be fully as much as Margaret and he had ever anticipated in their most sanguine moments, with the likelihood, too, of a steady increase as the years went on.

I must explain myself more fully on this head.

Margaret herself had rather more than a hundred a year; sometimes, indeed, her dividends had amounted to a hundred and thirty or forty pounds; but on

that she dared not rely. Doctor Brown had seventeen hundred remaining of the three thousand left him by his mother; and, out of this, he had to pay for some of the furniture, the bills for which had not been sent in at the time, in spite of all Margaret's entreaties that such might be the case. They came in about a week before the time when the events I am going to narrate took place. Of course they amounted to more than even the prudent Margaret had expected, and she was a little dispirited to find how much money it would take to liquidate them. But, curiously and contradictorily enough—as she had often noticed before—any real cause for anxiety or disappointment did not seem to affect her husband's cheerfulness. He laughed at her dismay over her accounts, jingled the proceeds of that day's work in his pockets, counted it out to her, and calculated the year's probable income from that day's gains. Margaret took the guineas, and carried them up stairs to her own secrétaire in silence; having learnt the difficult art of trying to swallow down her household cares in the presence of her husband. When she came back she was cheerful, if grave. He had taken up the bills in her absence, and had been adding them together.

"Two hundred and thirty-six pounds," he said, putting the accounts away to clear the table for tea,

as Crawford brought in the things. "Why, I don't call that much. I believe I reckoned on their coming to a great deal more. I'll go into the City to-morrow, and sell out some shares, and set your little heart at ease. Now don't go and put a spoonful less tea in to-night to help to pay these bills. Earning is better than saving, and I am earning at a famous rate. Give me good tea, Maggie, for I have done a good day's work."

They were sitting in the doctor's consulting-room, for the better economy of fire. To add to Margaret's discomfort, the chimney smoked this evening. She had held her tongue from any repining words; for she remembered the old proverb about a smoky chimney and a scolding wife; but she was more irritated by the puffs of smoke coming over her pretty white work than she cared to show; and it was in a sharper tone than usual that she spoke, in bidding Crawford take care and have the chimney swept. The next morning all had cleared brightly off. Her husband had convinced her that their money matters were going on well; the fire burned briskly at breakfast time, and the unwonted sun shone in at the windows. Margaret was surprised when Crawford told her that he had not been able to meet with a chimney-sweeper that morning, but that he had tried to arrange the coals in the grate so that, for this one morning at least, his mistress

should not be annoyed, and, by the next, he would take care to secure a sweep. Margaret thanked him, and acquiesced in all his plans about giving a general cleaning to the room, the more readily because she felt that she had spoken sharply the night before. She decided to go and pay all her bills, and make some distant calls on the next morning ; and her husband promised to go into the City and provide her with the money.

This he did. He showed her the notes that evening, locked them up for the night in his bureau ; and, lo, in the morning they were gone ! They had breakfasted in the back parlour, or half-furnished dining-room. A charwoman was in the front room, cleaning after the sweeps. Doctor Brown went to his bureau, singing an old Scotch tune as he left the dining-room. It was so long before he came back, that Margaret went to look for him. He was sitting in the chair nearest to the bureau, leaning his head upon it, in an attitude of the deepest despondency. He did not seem to hear Margaret's step, as she made her way among rolled-up carpets and chairs piled on each other. She had to touch him on the shoulder before she could rouse him.

"James, James !" she said in alarm.

He looked up at her almost as if he did not know her.

"O, Margaret !" he said, and took hold of her hands, and hid his face in her neck.

"Dearest love, what is it?" she asked, thinking he was suddenly taken ill.

"Some one has been to my bureau since last night," he groaned, without looking up or moving.

"And taken the money," said Margaret, in an instant understanding how it stood. It was a great blow; a great loss, far greater than the few extra pounds by which the bills had exceeded her calculations: yet it seemed as if she could bear it better. "O, dear!" she said, "that is bad; but after all—Do you know," she said, trying to raise his face, so that she might look into it, and give him the encouragement of her honest loving eyes, "at first I thought you were deadly ill, and all sorts of dreadful possibilities rushed through my mind,—it is such a relief to find that it is only money—"

"Only money!" he echoed, sadly, avoiding her look, as if he could not bear to show her how much he felt it.

"And after all," she said, with spirit, "it can't be gone far. Only last night here. The chimney-sweeps—we must send Crawford for the police directly. You did not take the numbers of the notes?" ringing the bell as she spoke.

"No; they were only to be in our possession one night," he said.

“No, to be sure not.”

The charwoman now appeared at the door with her pail of hot water. Margaret looked into her face, as if to read guilt or innocence. She was a protégée of Christie's, who was not apt to accord her favour easily, or without good grounds; an honest, decent widow, with a large family to maintain by her labour,—that was the character in which Margaret had engaged her; and she looked it. Grimy in her dress—because she could not spare the money or time to be clean—her skin looked healthy and cared for; she had a straightforward, business-like appearance about her, and seemed in no ways daunted nor surprised to see Doctor and Mrs. Brown standing in the middle of the room, in displeased perplexity and distress. She went about her business without taking any particular notice of them. Margaret's suspicions settled down yet more distinctly upon the chimney-sweeper; but he could not have gone far, the notes could hardly have got into circulation. Such a sum could not have been spent by such a man in so short a time, and the restoration of the money was her first, her only object. She had scarcely a thought for subsequent duties, such as prosecution of the offender, and the like consequences of crime. While her whole energies were bent on the speedy recovery of the money, and she was

rapidly going over the necessary steps to be taken, her husband "sat all poured out into his chair," as the Germans say; no force in him to keep his limbs in any attitude requiring the slightest exertion; his face sunk, miserable, and with that foreshadowing of the lines of age which sudden distress is apt to call out on the youngest and smoothest faces.

"What can Crawford be about?" said Margaret, pulling the bell again with vehemence. "O, Crawford!" as the man at that instant appeared at the door.

"Is anything the matter?" he said, interrupting her, as if alarmed into an unusual discomposure by her violent ringing. "I had just gone round the corner with the letter master gave me last night for the post, and when I came back Christie told me you had rung for me, ma'am. I beg your pardon, but I have hurried so," and, indeed, his breath did come quickly, and his face was full of penitent anxiety.

"O, Crawford! I am afraid the sweep has got into your master's bureau, and taken all the money he put there last night. It is gone, at any rate. Did you ever leave him in the room alone?"

"I can't say, ma'am; perhaps I did. Yes! I believe I did. I remember now,—I had my work to do; and I thought the charwoman was come, and I

went to my pantry ; and some time after Christie came to me, complaining that Mrs. Roberts was so late ; and then I knew that he must have been alone in the room. But, dear me, ma'am, who would have thought there had been so much wickedness in him ?”

“ How was it he got into the bureau ?” said Margaret, turning to her husband. “ Was the lock broken ?”

He roused himself up, like one who wakens from sleep.

“ Yes ! No ! I suppose I had turned the key without locking it last night. The bureau was closed, not locked, when I went to it this morning, and the bolt was shot.” He relapsed into inactive, thoughtful silence.

“ At any rate, it is no use losing time in wondering now. Go, Crawford, as fast as you can, for a policeman. You know the name of the chimney-sweeper, of course,” she added, as Crawford was preparing to leave the room.

“ Indeed, ma'am, I'm very sorry, but I just agreed with the first who was passing along the street. If I could have known—”

But Margaret had turned away with an impatient gesture of despair. Crawford went without another word to seek a policeman.

In vain did his wife try and persuade Doctor Brown to taste any breakfast ; a cup of tea was all he would try to swallow, and that was taken in hasty gulps, to clear his dry throat, as he heard Crawford's voice talking to the policeman whom he was ushering in.

The policeman heard all, and said little. Then the inspector came. Doctor Brown seemed to leave all the talking to Crawford, who apparently liked nothing better. Margaret was infinitely distressed and dismayed by the effect the robbery seemed to have on her husband's energies. The probable loss of such a sum was bad enough, but there was something so weak and poor in character, in letting it affect him so strongly—to deaden all energy and destroy all hopeful spring, that, although Margaret did not dare to define her feeling, nor the cause of it, to herself, she had the fact before her perpetually, that, if she were to judge of her husband from this morning only, she must learn to rely on herself alone in all cases of emergency. The inspector repeatedly turned from Crawford to Doctor and Mrs. Brown for answers to his inquiries. It was Margaret who replied, with terse, short sentences, very different from Crawford's long involved explanations.

At length the inspector asked to speak to her alone.

She followed him into the next room, past the affronted Crawford and her despondent husband. The inspector gave one sharp look at the charwoman, who was going on with her scouring with stolid indifference, turned her out, and then asked Margaret where Crawford came from,—how long he had lived with them, and various other questions, all showing the direction his suspicions had taken. This shocked Margaret extremely; but she quickly answered every inquiry; and, at the end, watched the inspector's face closely, and waited for the avowal of the suspicion.

He led the way back to the other room without a word, however. Crawford had left, and Doctor Brown was trying to read the morning's letters (which had just been delivered), but his hands shook so much that he could not see a line.

"Doctor Brown," said the inspector, "I have little doubt that your man-servant has committed this robbery. I judge so from his whole manner; and from his anxiety to tell the story, and his way of trying to throw suspicion on the chimney-sweeper, neither whose name nor dwelling can he give; at least he says not. Your wife tells us he has already been out of the house this morning, even before he went to summon a policeman; so there is little doubt that he has found means for concealing or disposing of the

notes ; and you say you do not know the numbers. However, that can probably be ascertained."

At this moment Christie knocked at the door, and, in a state of great agitation, demanded to speak to Margaret. She brought up an additional store of suspicious circumstances, none of them much in themselves, but all tending to criminate her fellow-servant. She had expected to find herself blamed for starting the idea of Crawford's guilt, and was rather surprised to find herself listened to with attention by the inspector. This led her to tell many other little things, all bearing against Crawford, which, a dread of being thought jealous and quarrelsome, had led her to conceal before from her master and mistress. At the end of her story the inspector said :

"There can be no doubt of the course to be taken. You, sir, must give your man-servant in charge. He will be taken before the sitting magistrate directly ; and there is already evidence enough to make him be remanded for a week ; during which time we may trace the notes, and complete the chain."

"Must I prosecute?" said Doctor Brown, almost lividly pale. "It is, I own, a serious loss of money to me ; but there will be the further expenses of the prosecution—the loss of time—the—"

He stopped. He saw his wife's indignant eyes fixed

upon him ; and shrank from their look of unconscious reproach.

"Yes, inspector," he said, "I give him in charge. Do what you will. Do what is right. Of course, I take the consequences. We take the consequences. Don't we, Margaret?" He spoke in a kind of wild low voice ; of which Margaret thought it best to take no notice.

"Tell us exactly what to do," she said, very coldly and quietly, addressing herself to the policeman.

He gave her the necessary directions as to their attending at the police-office, and bringing Christie as a witness, and then went away to take measures for securing Crawford.

Margaret was surprised to find how little hurry or violence needed to be used in Crawford's arrest. She had expected to hear sounds of commotion in the house, if indeed Crawford himself had not taken the alarm and escaped. But, when she had suggested the latter apprehension to the inspector, he smiled, and told her that when he had first heard of the charge from the policeman on the beat, he had stationed a detective officer within sight of the house, to watch all ingress or egress ; so that Crawford's whereabouts would soon have been discovered if he had attempted to escape.

Margaret's attention was now directed to her husband. He was making hurried preparations for setting off on his round of visits, and evidently did not wish to have any conversation with her on the subject of the morning's event. He promised to be back by eleven o'clock; before which time, the inspector had assured them, their presence would not be needed. Once or twice Doctor Brown said, as if to himself, "It is a miserable business." Indeed, Margaret felt it to be so; and now that the necessity for immediate speech and action was over, she began to fancy that she must be very hard-hearted—very deficient in common feeling; inasmuch as she had not suffered like her husband, at the discovery that the servant—whom they had been learning to consider as a friend, and to look upon as having their interests so warmly at heart—was, in all probability, a treacherous thief. She remembered all his pretty marks of attention to her, from the day when he had welcomed her arrival at her new home by his humble present of flowers, until only the day before, when, seeing her fatigued, he had, unasked, made her a cup of coffee,—coffee such as none but he could make. How often had he thought of warm dry clothes for her husband; how wakeful had he been at nights; how diligent in the mornings! It was no wonder that her husband

felt this discovery of domestic treason acutely. It was she who was hard and selfish, and thinking more of the recovery of the money than of the terrible disappointment in character, if the charge against Crawford were true.

At eleven o'clock her husband returned with a cab. Christie had thought the occasion of appearing at a police-office worthy of her Sunday clothes, and was as smart as her possessions could make her. But Margaret and her husband looked as pale and sorrow-stricken as if they had been the accused, and not the accusers.

Doctor Brown shrank from meeting Crawford's eye, as the one took his place in the witness-box, the other in the dock. Yet Crawford was trying—Margaret was sure of this—to catch his master's attention. Failing that, he looked at Margaret with an expression she could not fathom. Indeed, the whole character of his face was changed. Instead of the calm smooth look of attentive obedience, he had assumed an insolent, threatening expression of defiance; smiling occasionally in a most unpleasant manner, as Doctor Brown spoke of the bureau and its contents. He was remanded for a week; but, the evidence as yet being far from conclusive, bail for his appearance was taken. This bail was offered by his brother, a respectable

tradesman, well known in his neighbourhood, and to whom Crawford had sent on his arrest.

So Crawford was at large again, much to Christie's dismay; who took off her Sunday clothes, on her return home, with a heavy heart, hoping, rather than trusting, that they should not all be murdered in their beds before the week was out. It must be confessed, Margaret herself was not entirely free from fears of Crawford's vengeance; his eyes had looked so maliciously and vindictively at her and at her husband, as they gave their evidence.

But his absence in the household gave Margaret enough to do to prevent her dwelling on foolish fears. His being away made a terrible blank in their daily comfort, which neither Margaret nor Christie—exert themselves as they would—could fill up; and it was the more necessary that all should go on smoothly, as Doctor Brown's nerves had received such a shock, at the discovery of the guilt of his favourite, trusted servant, that Margaret was led at times to apprehend a serious illness. He would pace about the room at night, when he thought she was asleep, moaning to himself—and in the morning would require the utmost persuasion to induce him to go out and see his patients. He was worse than ever, after consulting the lawyer whom he had employed to conduct the prosecu-

tion. There was, as Margaret was brought unwillingly to perceive, some mystery in the case ; for he eagerly took his letters from the post, going to the door as soon as he heard the knock, and concealing their directions from her. As the week passed away, his nervous misery still increased.

One evening—the candles were not lighted—he was sitting over the fire in a listless attitude, resting his head on his hand, and that supported on his knee,—Margaret determined to try an experiment, to see if she could not probe, and find out the nature of the sore that he hid with such constant care. She took a stool and sat down at his feet, taking his hand in hers.

“Listen, dearest James, to an old story I once heard. It may interest you. There were two orphans, boy and girl in their hearts, though they were a young man and young woman in years. They were not brother and sister, and by-and-by they fell in love ; just in the same fond silly way you and I did, you remember. Well, the girl was amongst her own people, but the boy was far away from his,—if indeed he had any alive. But the girl loved him so dearly for himself, that sometimes she thought she was glad that he had no one to care for him but just her alone. Her friends did not like him as much as she did ; for, perhaps, they were wise, grave, cold people, and she,

I dare say, was very foolish. And they did not like her marrying the boy ; which was just stupidity in them, for they had not a word to say against him. But, about a week before the marriage day was fixed, they thought they had found out something—my darling love, don't take away your hand—don't tremble so, only just listen ! Her aunt came to her and said :—‘ Child, you must give up your lover : his father was tempted, and sinned, and if he is now alive he is a transported convict. The marriage cannot take place.’ But the girl stood up and said :—‘ If he has known this great sorrow and shame, he needs my love all the more. I will not leave him, nor forsake him, but love him all the better. And I charge you, aunt, as you hope to receive a blessing for doing as you would be done by, that you tell no one !’ I really think that girl awed her aunt, in some strange way, into secrecy. But, when she was left alone, she cried long and sadly, to think what a shadow rested on the heart she loved so dearly, and she meant to strive to lighten the life, and to conceal for ever that she had heard of the burden ; but now she thinks—O, my husband ! how you must have suffered—” as he bent down his head on her shoulder and cried terrible man's tears.

“ God be thanked !” he said at length. “ You

know all, and you do not shrink from me. O, what a miserable, deceitful coward I have been! Suffered! Yes—suffered enough to drive me mad; and if I had but been brave, I might have been spared all this long twelve months of agony. But it is right I should have been punished. And you knew it even before we were married, when you might have drawn back!”

“I could not: you would not have broken off your engagement with me, would you, under the like circumstances, if our cases had been reversed?”

“I do not know. Perhaps I might, for I am not so brave, so good, so strong as you, my Margaret. How could I be? Let me tell you more: We wandered about, my mother and I, thankful that our name was such a common one, but shrinking from every allusion—in a way which no one can understand, who has not been conscious of an inward sore. Living in an assize town was torture: a commercial one was nearly as bad. My father was the son of a dignified clergyman, well known to his brethren: a cathedral town was to be avoided, because there the circumstance of the Dean of Saint Botolph’s son having been transported, was sure to be known. I had to be educated; therefore we had to live in a town; for my mother could not bear to part from me, and I was sent to a day-school. We were very poor for our station—no! we

had no station ; we were the wife and child of a convict,—for my poor mother's early habits, I should have said. But, when I was about fourteen, my father died in his exile, leaving, as convicts in those days sometimes did, a large fortune. It all came to us. My mother shut herself up, and cried and prayed for a whole day.' Then she called me in, and took me into her counsel. We solemnly pledged ourselves to give the money to some charity, as soon as I was legally of age. Till then the interest was laid by, every penny of it: though sometimes we were in sore distresses for money, my education cost so much. But how could we tell in what way the money had been accumulated?" Here he dropped his voice. "Soon after I was one-and-twenty, the papers rang with admiration of the unknown munificent donor of certain sums. I loathed their praises. I shrank from all recollection of my father. I remembered him dimly, but always as angry and violent with my mother. My poor, gentle mother! Margaret, she loved my father; and, for her sake, I have tried, since her death, to feel kindly towards his memory. Soon after my mother's death, I came to know you, my jewel, my treasure!"

After a while, he began again. "But, O Margaret! even now you do not know the worst. After my mother's death, I found a bundle of law papers—of newspaper reports about my father's trial. Poor soul!

why she had kept them, I cannot say. They were covered over with notes in her handwriting; and, for that reason, I kept them. It was so touching to read her record of the days spent by her in her solitary innocence, while he was embroiling himself deeper and deeper in crime. I kept this bundle (as I thought so safely!) in a secret drawer of my bureau; but that wretch Crawford has got hold of it. I missed the papers that very morning. The loss of them was infinitely worse than the loss of the money; and now Crawford threatens to bring out the one terrible fact, in open court, if he can; and his lawyer may do it, I believe. At any rate, to have it blazoned out to the world,—I who have spent my life in fearing this hour! But most of all for you, Margaret! Still—if only it could be avoided! Who will employ the son of Brown, the noted forger? I shall lose all my practice. Men will look askance at me as I enter their doors. They will drive me into crime. I sometimes fear that crime is hereditary! O Margaret! what am I to do?”

“What can you do?” she asked.

“I can refuse to prosecute.”

“Let Crawford go free, you knowing him to be guilty?”

“I know him to be guilty.”

“Then, simply, you cannot do this thing. You let loose a criminal upon the public.”

"But if I do not, we shall come to shame and poverty. It is for you I mind it, not for myself. I ought never to have married."

"Listen to me. I don't care for poverty; and, as for shame, I should feel it twenty times more grievously, if you and I had consented to screen the guilty, from any fear or for any selfish motives of our own. I don't pretend that I shall not feel it, when first the truth is known. But my shame will turn into pride, as I watch you live it down. You have been rendered morbid, dear husband, by having something all your life to conceal. Let the world know the truth, and say the worst. You will go forth a free, honest, honourable man, able to do your future work without fear."

"That scoundrel Crawford has sent for an answer to his impudent note," said Christie, putting in her head at the door.

"Stay! May *I* write it?" said Margaret.

She wrote:—

Whatever you may do or say, there is but one course open to us. No threats can deter your master from doing his duty.

MARGARET BROWN.

"There!" she said, passing it to her husband; "he will see that I know all, and I suspect he has reckoned something on your tenderness for me."

Margaret's note only enraged, it did not daunt,

Crawford. Before a week was out, every one who cared knew that Doctor Brown, the rising young physician, was son of the notorious Brown the forger. All the consequences took place which he had anticipated. Crawford had to suffer a severe sentence; and Doctor Brown and his wife had to leave their house and to go to a smaller one; they had to pinch and to screw, aided in all most zealously by the faithful Christie. But Doctor Brown was lighter-hearted than he had ever been before in his conscious life-time. His foot was now firmly planted on the ground, and every step he rose was a sure gain. People did say, that Margaret had been seen, in those worst times, on her hands and knees cleaning her own door-step. But I don't believe it, for Christie would never have let her do that. And, as far as my own evidence goes, I can only say that, the last time I was in London, I saw a brass-plate with Doctor James Brown upon it, on the door of a handsome house in a handsome square. And as I looked, I saw a brougham drive up to the door, and a lady get out, and go into that house, who was certainly the Margaret Frazer of old days—graver, more portly, more stern I had almost said. But, as I watched and thought, I saw her come to the dining-room window with a baby in her arms, and her whole face melted into a smile of infinite sweetness.

THE MANCHESTER MARRIAGE.

MR. and Mrs. Openshaw came from Manchester to settle in London. He had been, what is called in Lancashire, a Salesman for a large manufacturing firm, who were extending their business, and opening a warehouse in the city; where Mr. Openshaw was now to superintend their affairs. He rather enjoyed the change; having a kind of curiosity about London, which he had never yet been able to gratify in his brief visits to the metropolis. At the same time, he had an odd, shrewd, contempt for the inhabitants; whom he always pictured to himself as fine, lazy people; caring nothing but for fashion and aristocracy, and lounging away their days in Bond Street, and such places; ruining good English, and ready in their turn to despise him as a provincial. The hours that the men of business kept in the city scandalized him too, accustomed as

he was to the early dinners of Manchester folk and the consequently far longer evenings. Still, he was pleased to go to London ; though he would not for the world have confessed it, even to himself, and always spoke of the step to his friends as one demanded of him by the interests of his employers, and sweetened to him by a considerable increase of salary. This, indeed, was so liberal that he might have been justified in taking a much larger house than the one he did, had he not thought himself bound to set an example to Londoners of how little a Manchester man of business cared for show. Inside, however, he furnished it with an unusual degree of comfort, and, in the winter-time, he insisted on keeping up as large fires as the grates would allow, in every room where the temperature was in the least chilly. Moreover, his northern sense of hospitality was such, that, if he were at home, he could hardly suffer a visitor to leave the house without forcing meat and drink upon him. Every servant in the house was well warmed, well fed, and kindly treated ; for their master scorned all petty saving in aught that conduced to comfort ; while he amused himself by following out all his accustomed habits and individual ways, in defiance of what any of his new neighbours might think.

His wife was a pretty, gentle woman, of suitable age and character. He was forty-two, she thirty-five. He was loud and decided; she soft and yielding. They had two children; or rather, I should say, she had two; for the elder, a girl of eleven, was Mrs. Openshaw's child by Frank Wilson, her first husband. The younger was a little boy, Edwin, who could just prattle, and to whom his father delighted to speak in the broadest and most unintelligible Lancashire dialect, in order 'to keep up what he called the true Saxon accent.

Mrs. Openshaw's Christian-name was Alice, and her first husband had been her own cousin. She was the orphan niece of a sea-captain in Liverpool; a quiet, grave little creature, of great personal attraction when she was fifteen or sixteen, with regular features and a blooming complexion. But she was very shy, and believed herself to be very stupid and awkward; and was frequently scolded by her aunt, her own uncle's second wife. So when her cousin, Frank Wilson, came home from a long absence at sea, and first was kind and protective to her; secondly, attentive, and thirdly, desperately in love with her, she hardly knew how to be grateful enough to him. It is true, she would have preferred his remaining in the first or second stages of behaviour; for his

violent love puzzled and frightened her. Her uncle neither helped nor hindered the love affair ; though it was going on under his own eyes. Frank's stepmother had such a variable temper, that there was no knowing whether what she liked one day she would like the next, or not. At length she went to such extremes of crossness, that Alice was only too glad to shut her eyes and rush blindly at the chance of escape from domestic tyranny offered her by a marriage with her cousin ; and, liking him better than any one in the world, except her uncle (who was at this time at sea), she went off one morning and was married to him ; her only bridesmaid being the housemaid at her aunt's. The consequence was, that Frank and his wife went into lodgings, and Mrs. Wilson refused to see them, and turned away Norah, the warm-hearted housemaid, whom they accordingly took into their service. When Captain Wilson returned from his voyage, he was very cordial with the young couple, and spent many an evening at their lodgings, smoking his pipe, and sipping his grog ; but he told them that, for quietness' sake, he could not ask them to his own house ; for his wife was bitter against them. They were not, however, very unhappy about this.


The seed of future unhappiness lay rather in Frank's vehement, passionate disposition ; which led

him to resent his wife's shyness and want of demonstrativeness as failures in conjugal duty. He was already tormenting himself, and her too, in a slighter degree, by apprehensions and imaginations of what might befall her during his approaching absence at sea. At last, he went to his father and urged him to insist upon Alice's being once more received under his roof; the more especially as there was now a prospect of her confinement while her husband was away on his voyage. Captain Wilson was, as he himself expressed it, "breaking up," and unwilling to undergo the excitement of a scene; yet he felt that what his son said was true. So he went to his wife. And before Frank set sail, he had the comfort of seeing his wife installed in her old little garret in his father's house. To have placed her in the one best spare room, was a step beyond Mrs. Wilson's powers of submission or generosity. The worst part about it, however, was that the faithful Norah had to be dismissed. Her place as housemaid had been filled up; and, even if it had not, she had forfeited Mrs. Wilson's good opinion for ever. She comforted her young master and mistress by pleasant prophecies of the time when they would have a household of their own; of which, whatever service she might be in meanwhile, she should be sure to form a part. Almost the last action Frank did, before setting

sail, was going with Alice to see Norah once more at her mother's house ; and then he went away.

Alice's father-in-law grew more and more feeble as winter advanced. She was of great use to her step-mother in nursing and amusing him ; and, although there was anxiety enough in the household, there was, perhaps, more of peace than there had been for years ; for Mrs. Wilson had not a bad heart, and was softened by the visible approach of death to one whom she loved, and, touched by the lonely condition of the young creature, expecting her first confinement in her husband's absence. To this relenting mood Norah owed the permission to come and nurse Alice when her baby was born, and to remain to attend on Captain Wilson.

Before one letter had been received from Frank (who had sailed for the East Indies and China), his father died. Alice was always glad to remember that he had held her baby in his arms, and kissed and blessed it before his death. After that, and the consequent examination into the state of his affairs, it was found that he had left far less property than people had been led by his style of living to expect ; and what money there was, was all settled upon his wife, and at her disposal after her death. This did not signify much to Alice, as Frank was now first mate



of his ship, and, in another voyage or two, would be captain. Meanwhile he had left her rather more than two hundred pounds (all his savings) in the bank.

It became time for Alice to hear from her husband. One letter from the Cape she had already received. The next was to announce his arrival in India. As week after week passed over, and no intelligence of the ship having got there reached the office of the owners, and the Captain's wife was in the same state of ignorant suspense as Alice herself, her fears grew most oppressive. At length the day came when, in reply to her inquiry at the Shipping Office, they told her that the owners had given up hope of ever hearing more of the 'Betsy-Jane,' and had sent in their claim upon the Underwriters. Now that he was gone for ever, she first felt a yearning, longing love for the kind cousin, the dear friend, the sympathizing protector, whom she should never see again;—first felt a passionate desire to show him his child, whom she had hitherto rather craved to have all to herself—her own sole possession. Her grief was, however, noiseless, and quiet—rather to the scandal of Mrs. Wilson; who bewailed her stepson as if he and she had always lived together in perfect harmony, and who evidently thought it her duty to burst into fresh tears at every strange face she saw; dwelling on his poor young

widow's desolate state, and the helplessness of the fatherless child, with an unction, as if she liked the excitement of the sorrowful story.

So passed away the first days of Alice's widowhood. By-and-by things subsided into their natural and tranquil course. But, as if this young creature was always to be in some heavy trouble, her ewe-lamb began to be ailing, pining, and sickly. The child's mysterious illness turned out to be some affection of the spine, likely to affect health, but not to shorten life—at least, so the doctors said. But the long, dreary suffering of one whom a mother loves as Alice loved her only child, is hard to look forward to. Only Norah guessed what Alice suffered ; no one but God knew.

And so it fell out, that when Mrs. Wilson, the elder, came to her one day, in violent distress, occasioned by a very material diminution in the value of the property that her husband had left her,—a diminution which made her income barely enough to support herself, much less Alice—the latter could hardly understand how anything which did not touch health or life could cause such grief ; and she received the intelligence with irritating composure. But when, that afternoon, the little sick child was brought in, and the grandmother—who after all loved it well—began a fresh moan over her losses to its unconscious

ears—saying how she had planned to consult this or that doctor, and to give it this or that comfort or luxury in after years, but that now all chance of this had passed away—Alice's heart was touched, and she drew near to Mrs. Wilson with unwonted caresses, and, in a spirit not unlike to that of Ruth, entreated that, come what would, they might remain together. After much discussion in succeeding days, it was arranged that Mrs. Wilson should take a house in Manchester, furnishing it partly with what furniture she had, and providing the rest with Alice's remaining two hundred pounds. Mrs. Wilson was herself a Manchester woman, and naturally longed to return to her native town; some connections of her own, too, at that time 'required lodgings, for which they were willing to pay pretty handsomely. Alice undertook the active superintendence and superior work of the household; Norah, willing, faithful Norah, offered to cook, scour, do anything in short, so that she might but remain with them.

The plan succeeded. For some years, their first lodgers remained with them, and all went smoothly,—with the one sad exception of the little girl's increasing deformity. How that mother loved that child, it is not for words to tell!

Then came a break of misfortune. Their lodgers

left, and no one succeeded to them. After some months, it became necessary to remove to a smaller house; and Alice's tender conscience was torn by the idea that she ought not to be a burden to her mother-in-law, but to go out and seek her own maintenance. And leave her child! The thought came like the sweeping boom of a funeral bell over her heart.

By-and-by, Mr. Openshaw came to lodge with them. He had started in life as the errand-boy and sweeper-out of a warehouse; had struggled up through all the grades of employment in it, fighting his way through the hard striving Manchester life with strong, pushing energy of character. Every spare moment of time had been sternly given up to self-teaching. He was a capital accountant, a good French and German scholar, a keen, far-seeing, tradesman,—understanding markets, and the bearing of events, both near and distant, on trade: and yet, with such vivid attention to present details, that I do not think he ever saw a group of flowers in the fields without thinking whether their colours would, or would not, form harmonious contrasts in the coming spring muslins and prints. He went to debating societies, and threw himself with all his heart and soul into politics; esteeming, it must be owned, every man a fool or a knave who differed from him, and overthrowing his opponents rather by the loud

strength of his language than the calm strength of his logic. There was something of the Yankee in all this. Indeed, his theory ran parallel to the famous Yankee motto—"England flogs creation, and Manchester flogs England." Such a man, as may be fancied, had had no time for falling in love, or any such nonsense. At the age when most young men go through their courting and matrimony, he had not the means of keeping a wife, and was far too practical to think of having one. And now that he was in easy circumstances, a rising man, he considered women almost as incumbrances to the world, with whom a man had better have as little to do as possible. His first impression of Alice was indistinct, and he did not care enough about her to make it distinct. "A pretty yea-nay kind of woman," would have been his description of her, if he had been pushed into a corner. He was rather afraid, in the beginning, that her quiet ways arose from a listlessness and laziness of character, which would have been exceedingly discordant to his active, energetic nature. But, when he found out the punctuality with which his wishes were attended to, and her work was done; when he was called in the morning at the very stroke of the clock, his shaving-water scalding hot, his fire bright, his coffee made exactly as his peculiar fancy dictated, (for he was a man who had his theory

about everything based upon what he knew of science, and often perfectly original)—then he began to think : not that Alice had any peculiar merit, but that he had got into remarkably good lodgings ; his restlessness wore away, and he began to consider himself as almost settled for life in them.

Mr. Openshaw had been too busy, all his days, to be introspective. He did not know that he had any tenderness in his nature ; and if he had become conscious of its abstract existence, he would have considered it as a manifestation of disease in some part of him. But he was decoyed into pity unawares ; and pity led on to tenderness. That little helpless child—always carried about by one of the three busy women of the house, or else patiently threading coloured beads in the chair from which, by no effort of its own, could it ever move,—the great grave blue eyes, full of serious, not uncheerful, expression, giving to the small delicate face a look beyond its years,—the soft plaintive voice dropping out but few words, so unlike the continual prattle of a child,—caught Mr. Openshaw's attention in spite of himself. One day—he half scorned himself for doing so—he cut short his dinner-hour to go in search of some toy, which should take the place of those eternal beads. I forget what he bought ; but, when he gave the present

(which he took care to do in a short, abrupt manner, and when no one was by to see him), he was almost thrilled by the flash of delight that came over that child's face, and he could not help, all through that afternoon, going over and over again the picture left on his memory, by the bright effect of unexpected joy on the little girl's face. When he returned home, he found his slippers placed by his sitting-room fire ; and even more careful attention paid to his fancies than was habitual in those model lodgings. When Alice had taken the last of his tea-things away—she had been silent as usual till then—she stood for an instant with the door in her hand. Mr. Openshaw looked as if he were deep in his book, though in fact he did not see a line ; but was heartily wishing the woman would go, and not make any palaver of gratitude. But she only said :

“I am very much obliged to you, sir. Thank you very much,” and was gone, even before he could send her away with a “There, my good woman, that's enough !”

For some time longer he took no apparent notice of the child. He even hardened his heart into disregarding her sudden flush of colour and little timid smile of recognition, when he saw her by chance. But, after all, this could not last for ever ; and,

having a second time given way to tenderness, there was no relapse. The insidious enemy having thus entered his heart, in the guise of compassion to the child, soon assumed the more dangerous form of interest in the mother. He was aware of this change of feeling,—despised himself for it,—struggled with it; nay, internally yielded to it and cherished it, long before he suffered the slightest expression of it, by word, action, or look to escape him. He watched Alice's docile, obedient ways to her stepmother; the love which she had inspired in the rough Norah (roughened by the wear and tear of sorrow and years); but, above all, he saw the wild, deep, passionate affection existing between her and her child. They spoke little to any one else, or when any one else was by; but, when alone together, they talked, and murmured, and cooed, and chattered so continually, that Mr. Openshaw first wondered what they could find to say to each other, and next became irritated because they were always so grave and silent with him. All this time he was perpetually devising small new pleasures for the child. His thoughts ran, in a pertinacious way, upon the desolate life before her; and often he came back from his day's work loaded with the very thing Alice had been longing for, but had not been able to procure. One time,

it was a little chair for drawing the little sufferer along the streets ; and, many an evening that following summer, Mr. Openshaw drew her along himself, regardless of the remarks of his acquaintances. One day in autumn, he put down his newspaper, as Alice came in with the breakfast, and said, in as indifferent a voice as he could assume :—

“Mrs. Frank, is there any reason why we two should not put up our horses together?”

Alice stood still in perplexed wonder. What did he mean? He had resumed the reading of his newspaper, as if he did not expect any answer ; so she found silence her safest course, and went on quietly arranging his breakfast, without another word passing between them. Just as he was leaving the house, to go to the warehouse as usual, he turned back and put his head into the bright, neat, tidy kitchen, where all the women breakfasted in the morning :—

“You’ll think of what I said, Mrs. Frank ” (this was her name with the lodgers), “and let me have your opinion upon it to-night.”

Alice was thankful that her mother and Norah were too busy talking together to attend much to this speech. She determined not to think about it at all through the day ; and, of course, the effort not to think, made her think all the more. At night she

sent up Norah with his tea. But Mr. Openshaw almost knocked Norah down as she was going out at the door, by pushing past her and calling out, "Mrs. Frank !" in an impatient voice, at the top of the stairs.

Alice went up, rather than seem to have affixed too much meaning to his words.

"Well, Mrs. Frank," he said, "what answer? Don't make it too long; for I have lots of office work to get through to-night."

"I hardly know what you meant, sir," said truthful Alice.

"Well! I should have thought you might have guessed. You're not new at this sort of work, and I am. However, I'll make it plain this time. Will you have me to be thy wedded husband, and serve me, and love me, and honour me, and all that sort of thing? Because, if you will, I will do as much by you, and be a father to your child—and that's more than is put in the Prayer-book. Now, I'm a man of my word; and what I say, I feel; and what I promise, I'll do. Now, for your answer!"

Alice was silent. He began to make the tea, as if her reply was a matter of perfect indifference to him; but, as soon as that was done, he became impatient.

"Well?" said he.

"How long, sir, may I have to think over it?"

"Three minutes!" (looking at his watch). "You've had two already—that makes five. Be a sensible woman, say Yes, and sit down to tea with me, and we'll talk it over together; for, after tea, I shall be busy; say No" (he hesitated a moment to try and keep his voice in the same tone), "and I shan't say another word about it, but pay up a year's rent for my rooms to-morrow, and be off. Time's up! Yes or no?"

"If you please, sir,—you have been so good to little Ailsie—"

"There, sit down comfortably by me on the sofa, and let us have our tea together. I am glad to find you are as good and sensible as I took you for."

And this was Alice Wilson's second wooing.

Mr. Openshaw's will was too strong, and his circumstances too good, for him not to carry all before him. He settled Mrs. Wilson in a comfortable house of her own, and made her quite independent of lodgers. The little that Alice said with regard to future plans was in Norah's behalf.

"No," said Mr. Openshaw. "Norah shall take care of the old lady as long as she lives; and, after that, she shall either come and live with us, or, if she

likes it better, she shall have a provision for life—for your sake, missus. No one who has been good to you or the child shall go unrewarded. But even the little one will be better for some fresh stuff about her. Get her a bright, sensible girl as a nurse: one who won't go rubbing her with calf's-foot jelly as Norah does; wasting good stuff outside that ought to go in, but will follow doctors' directions; which, as you must see pretty clearly by this time, Norah won't; because they give the poor little wench pain. Now, I'm not above being nesh for other folks myself. I can stand a good blow, and never change colour; but, set me in the operating-room in the Infirmary, and I turn as sick as a girl. Yet, if need were, I would hold the little wench on my knees while she screeched with pain, if it were to do her poor back good. Nay, nay, wench! keep your white looks for the time when it comes—I don't say it ever will. But this I know, Norah will spare the child and cheat the doctor, if she can. Now, I say, give the bairn a year or two's chance, and then, when the pack of doctors have done their best—and, maybe, the old lady has gone—we'll have Norah back, or do better for her."

The pack of doctors could do no good to little Ailsie. She was beyond their power. But her father (for so he insisted on being called, and also on Alice's

no longer retaining the appellation of Mamma, but becoming henceforward Mother), by his healthy cheerfulness of manner, his clear decision of purpose, his odd turns and quirks of humour, added to his real strong love for the helpless little girl, infused a new element of brightness and confidence into her life ; and, though her back remained the same, her general health was strengthened, and Alice—never going beyond a smile herself—had the pleasure of seeing her child taught to laugh.

As for Alice's own life, it was happier than it had ever been before. Mr. Openshaw required no demonstration, no expressions of affection from her. Indeed, these would rather have disgusted him. Alice could love deeply, but could not talk about it. The perpetual requirement of loving words, looks, and caresses, and misconstruing their absence into absence of love, had been the great trial of her former married life. Now, all went on clear and straight, under the guidance of her husband's strong sense, warm heart, and powerful will. Year by year, their worldly prosperity increased. At Mrs. Wilson's death, Norah came back to them, as nurse to the newly-born little Edwin ; into which post she was not installed without a pretty strong oration on the part of the proud and happy father ; who declared that if he found out that

Norah ever tried to screen the boy by a falsehood, or to make him nesh either in body or mind, she should go that very day. Norah and Mr. Openshaw were not on the most thoroughly cordial terms; neither of them fully recognizing or appreciating the other's best qualities.

This was the previous history of the Lancashire family who had now removed to London.

They had been there about a year, when Mr. Openshaw suddenly informed his wife that he had determined to heal long-standing feuds, and had asked his uncle and aunt Chadwick to come and pay them a visit and see London. Mrs. Openshaw had never seen this uncle and aunt of her husband's. Years before she had married him, there had been a quarrel. All she knew was, that Mr. Chadwick was a small manufacturer in a country town in South Lancashire. She was extremely pleased that the breach was to be healed, and began making preparations to render their visit pleasant.

They arrived at last. Going to see London was such an event to them, that Mrs. Chadwick had made all new linen fresh for the occasion—from nightcaps downwards; and as for gowns, ribbons, and collars, she might have been going into the wilds of Canada where never a shop is, so large was her stock. A

fortnight before the day of her departure for London, she had formally called to take leave of all her acquaintance ; saying she should need every bit of the intermediate time for packing up. It was like a second wedding in her imagination ; and, to complete the resemblance which an entirely new wardrobe made between the two events, her husband brought her back from Manchester, on the last market-day before they set off, a gorgeous pearl and amethyst brooch, saying, "Lunnon should see that Lancashire folks knew a handsome thing when they saw it."

For some time after Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick arrived at the Openshaws' there was no opportunity for wearing this brooch ; but at length they obtained an order to see Buckingham Palace, and the spirit of loyalty demanded that Mrs. Chadwick should wear her best clothes in visiting the abode of her sovereign. On her return, she hastily changed her dress ; for Mr. Openshaw had planned that they should go to Richmond, drink tea, and return by moonlight. Accordingly, about five o'clock, Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw and Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick set off.

The housemaid and cook sat below, Norah hardly knew where. She was always engrossed in the nursery, in tending her two children, and in sitting by the restless, excitable Ailsie till she fell asleep. By-and-by,

the housemaid Bessy tapped gently at the door. Norah went to her, and they spoke in whispers.

“Nurse! there’s some one down stairs wants you.”

“Wants me! Who is it?”

“A gentleman—”

“A gentleman? Nonsense!”

“Well! a man, then, and he asks for you, and he rang at the front-door bell, and has walked into the dining-room.”

“You should never have let him,” exclaimed Norah, “master and missus out—”

“I did not want him to come in; but, when he heard you lived here, he walked past me, and sat down on the first chair, and said, ‘Tell her to come and speak to me.’ There is no gas lighted in the room, and supper is all set out.”

“He’ll be off with the spoons!” exclaimed Norah, putting the housemaid’s fear into words, and preparing to leave the room, first, however, giving a look to Ailsie, sleeping soundly and calmly.

Down stairs she went, uneasy fears stirring in her bosom. Before she entered the dining-room she provided herself with a candle, and, with it in her hand, she went in, looking around her in the darkness for her visitor.

He was standing up, holding by the table. Norah

and he looked at each other; gradual recognition coming into their eyes.

“Norah?” at length he asked.

“Who are you?” asked Norah, with the sharp tones of alarm and incredulity. “I don’t know you:” trying, by futile words of disbelief, to do away with the terrible fact before her.

“Am I so changed?” he said, pathetically. “I dare say I am. But, Norah, tell me!” he breathed hard, “where is my wife? Is she—is she alive?”

He came nearer to Norah, and would have taken her hand; but she backed away from him; looking at him all the time with staring eyes, as if he were some horrible object. Yet he was a handsome, bronzed, good-looking fellow, with beard and moustache, giving him a foreign-looking aspect; but his eyes! there was no mistaking those eager, beautiful eyes—the very same that Norah had watched not half an hour ago, till sleep stole softly over them.

“Tell me, Norah—I can bear it—I have feared it so often. Is she dead?” Norah still kept silence, “She is dead!” He hung on Norah’s words and looks, as if for confirmation or contradiction.

“What shall I do?” groaned Norah. “O, sir! why did you come? how did you find me out? where have you been? We thought you dead, we did

indeed!" She poured out words and questions to gain time, as if time would help her.

"Norah! answer me this question straight, by yes or no—Is my wife dead?"

"No, she is not!" said Norah, slowly and heavily.

"O, what a relief! Did she receive my letters? But perhaps you don't know. Why did you leave her? Where is she? O, Norah, tell me all quickly!"

"Mr. Frank!" said Norah at last, almost driven to bay by her terror lest her mistress should return at any moment, and find him there—unable to consider what was best to be done or said—rushing at something decisive, because she could not endure her present state: "Mr. Frank! we never heard a line from you, and the shipowners said you had gone down, you and every one else. We thought you were dead, if ever man was, and poor Miss Alice and her little sick, helpless child! O, sir, you must guess it," cried the poor creature at last, bursting out into a passionate fit of crying, "for indeed I cannot tell it. But it was no one's fault. God help us all this night!"

Norah had sat down. She trembled too much to stand. He took her hands in his. He squeezed them hard, as if, by physical pressure, the truth could be wrung out.

“Norah.” This time his tone was calm, stagnant as despair. “She has married again!”

Norah shook her head sadly. The grasp slowly relaxed. The man had fainted.

There was brandy in the room. - Norah forced some drops into Mr. Frank’s mouth, chafed his hands, and —when mere animal life returned, before the mind poured in its flood of memories and thoughts—she lifted him up, and rested his head against her knees. Then she put a few crumbs of bread taken from the supper-table, soaked in brandy, into his mouth. Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

“Where is she? Tell me this instant.” He looked so wild, so mad, so desperate, that Norah felt herself to be in bodily danger; but her time of dread had gone by. She had been afraid to tell him the truth, and then she had been a coward. Now, her wits were sharpened by the sense of his desperate state. He must leave the house. She would pity him afterwards; but now she must rather command and upbraid; for he must leave the house before her mistress came home. That one necessity stood clear before her.

“She is not here: that is enough for you to know. Nor can I say exactly where she is” (which was true to the letter if not to the spirit). “Go away, and

tell me where to find you to-morrow, and I will tell you all. My master and mistress may come back at any minute, and then what would become of me, with a strange man in the house?"

Such an argument was too petty to touch his excited mind.

"I don't care for your master and mistress. If your master is a man, he must feel for me—poor ship-wrecked sailor that I am—kept for years a prisoner amongst savages, always, always, always thinking of my wife and my home—dreaming of her by night, talking to her, though she could not hear, by day. I loved her more than all heaven and earth put together. Tell me where she is, this instant, you wretched woman, who salved over her wickedness to her, as you do to me!"

The clock struck ten. Desperate positions require desperate measures.

"If you will leave the house now, I will come to you to-morrow and tell you all. What is more, you shall see your child now. She lies sleeping up-stairs. O, sir, you have a child, you do not know that as yet—a little weakly girl—with just a heart and soul beyond her years. We have reared her up with such care! We watched her, for we thought for many a year she might die any day, and we tended her, and no

hard thing has come near her, and no rough word has ever been said to her. And now you come and will take her life into your hand, and will crush it. Strangers to her have been kind to her ; but her own father—Mr. Frank, I am her nurse, and I love her, and I tend her, and I would do anything for her that I could. Her mother's heart beats as hers beats ; and, if she suffers a pain, her mother trembles all over. If she is happy, it is her mother that smiles and is glad. If she is growing stronger, her mother is healthy : if she dwindles, her mother languishes. If she dies—well, I don't know : it is not every one can lie down and die when they wish it. Come up stairs, Mr. Frank, and see your child. Seeing her will do good to your poor heart. Then go away, in God's name, just this one night ;—to-morrow, if need be, you can do anything—kill us all if you will, or show yourself a great, grand man, whom God will bless for ever and ever. Come, Mr. Frank, the look of a sleeping child is sure to give peace.”

She led him up-stairs ; at first almost helping his steps, till they came near the nursery door. She had well-nigh forgotten the existence of little Edwin. It struck upon her with affright as the shaded light fell over the other cot ; but she skilfully threw that corner of the room into darkness, and let the light

fall on the sleeping Ailsie. The child had thrown down the coverings, and her deformity, as she lay with her back to them, was plainly visible through her slight night-gown. Her little face, deprived of the lustre of her eyes, looked wan and pinched, and had a pathetic expression in it, even as she slept. The poor father looked and looked with hungry, wistful eyes, into which the big tears came swelling up slowly and dropped heavily down, as he stood trembling and shaking all over. Norah was angry with herself, for growing impatient of the length of time that long lingering gaze lasted. She thought that she waited for full half an hour before Frank stirred. And then—instead of going away—he sank down on his knees by the bedside, and buried his face in the clothes. Little Ailsie stirred uneasily. Norah pulled him up in terror. She could afford no more time, even for prayer, in her extremity of fear; for surely the next moment would bring her mistress home. She took him forcibly by the arm: but, as he was going, his eye lighted on the other bed: he stopped. Intelligence came back into his face. His hands clenched.

“His child?” he asked.

“Her child,” replied Norah. “God watches over him,” said she instinctively; for Frank’s looks excited

her fears, and she needed to remind herself of the Protector of the helpless.

“God has not watched over me,” he said, in despair; his thoughts apparently recoiling on his own desolate, deserted state. But Norah had no time for pity. To-morrow she would be as compassionate as her heart prompted. At length she guided him down-stairs, and shut the outer door, and bolted it—as if by bolts to keep out facts.

Then she went back into the dining-room, and effaced all traces of his presence, as far as she could. She went up-stairs to the nursery and sat there, her head on her hand, thinking what was to come of all this misery. It seemed to her very long before her master and mistress returned; yet it was hardly eleven o’clock. She heard the loud, hearty Lancashire voices on the stairs; and, for the first time, she understood the contrast of the desolation of the poor man who had so lately gone forth in lonely despair.

It almost put her out of patience to see Mrs. Openshaw come in, calmly smiling, handsomely dressed, happy, easy, to inquire after her children.

“Did Ailsie go to sleep comfortably?” she whispered to Norah.

“Yes.”

Her mother bent over her, looking at her slumbers

with the soft eyes of love. How little she dreamed who had looked on her last! Then she went to Edwin, with perhaps less wistful anxiety in her countenance, but more of pride. She took off her things, to go down to supper. Norah saw her no more that night.

Beside having a door into the passage, the sleeping-nursery opened out of Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw's room, in order that they might have the children more immediately under their own eyes. Early the next summer morning, Mrs. Openshaw was awakened by Ailsie's startled call of "Mother! mother!" She sprang up, put on her dressing-gown, and went to her child. Ailsie was only half awake, and in a not unusual state of terror.

"Who was he mother? Tell me!"

"Who, my darling? No one is here. You have been dreaming, love. Waken up quite. See, it is broad daylight."

"Yes," said Ailsie, looking round her; then clinging to her mother, "but a man was here in the night, mother."

"Nonsense, little goose. No man has ever come near you!"

"Yes, he did. He stood there. Just by Norah. A man with hair and a beard. And he knelt down

and said his prayers. Norah knows he was here, mother" (half angrily, as Mrs. Openshaw shook her head in smiling incredulity).

"Well! we will ask Norah when she comes," said Mrs. Openshaw, soothingly. "But we won't talk any more about him now. It is not five o'clock; it is too early for you to get up. Shall I fetch you a book and read to you?"

"Don't leave me, mother," said the child, clinging to her. So Mrs. Openshaw sat on the bedside talking to Ailsie, and telling her of what they had done at Richmond the evening before, until the little girl's eyes slowly closed and she once more fell asleep.

"What was the matter?" asked Mr. Openshaw, as his wife returned to bed.

"Ailsie wakened up in a fright, with some story of a man having been in the room to say his prayers,—a dream, I suppose." And no more was said at the time.

Mrs. Openshaw had almost forgotten the whole affair when she got up about seven o'clock. But, by-and-by, she heard a sharp altercation going on in the nursery—Norah speaking angrily to Ailsie, a most unusual thing. Both Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw listened in astonishment.

"Hold your tongue, Ailsie! let me hear none of

your dreams ; never let me hear you tell that story again !” Ailsie began to cry.

Mr. Openshaw opened the door of communication, before his wife could say a word.

“Norah, come here !”

The nurse stood at the door, defiant. She perceived she had been heard, but she was desperate.

“Don’t let me hear you speak in that manner to Ailsie again,” he said sternly, and shut the door.

Norah was infinitely relieved ; for she had dreaded some questioning ; and a little blame for sharp speaking was what she could well bear, if cross examination was let alone.

Down-stairs they went, Mr. Openshaw carrying Ailsie ; the sturdy Edwin coming step by step, right foot foremost, always holding his mother’s hand. Each child was placed in a chair by the breakfast-table, and then Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw stood together at the window, awaiting their visitors’ appearance and making plans for the day. There was a pause. Suddenly Mr. Openshaw turned to Ailsie, and said :

“What a little goosy somebody is with her dreams, wakening up poor, tired mother in the middle of the night, with a story of a man being in the room.”

“Father ! I’m sure I saw him,” said Ailsie, half crying. “I don’t want to make Norah angry ; but I was

not asleep, for all she says I was. I had been asleep, —and I wakened up quite wide awake, though I was so frightened. I kept my eyes nearly shut, and I saw the man quite plain. A great brown man with a beard. He said his prayers. And then he looked at Edwin. And then Noráh took him by the arm and led him away, after they had whispered a bit together.”

“Now, my little woman must be reasonable,” said Mr. Openshaw, who was always patient with Ailsie. “There was no man in the house last night at all. No man comes into the house, as you know, if you think ; much less goes up into the nursery. But sometimes we dream something has happened, and the dream is so like reality, that you are not the first person, little woman, who has stood out that the thing has really happened.”

“But, indeed it was not a dream !” said Ailsie, beginning to cry.

Just then Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick came down, looking grave and discomposed. All during breakfast time, they were silent and uncomfortable. As soon as the breakfast things were taken away, and the children had been carried up-stairs, Mr. Chadwick began, in an evidently preconcerted manner, to inquire if his nephew was certain that all his servants were honest ; for, that

Mrs. Chadwick had that morning missed a very valuable brooch, which she had worn the day before. She remembered taking it off when she came home from Buckingham Palace. Mr. Openshaw's face contracted into hard lines: grew like what it was before he had known his wife and her child. He rang the bell, even before his uncle had done speaking. It was answered by the housemaid.

"Mary, was any one here last night, while we were away?"

"A man, sir, came to speak to Norah."

"To speak to Norah! Who was he? How long did he stay?"

"I'm sure I can't tell, sir. He came—perhaps about nine. I went up to tell Norah in the nursery, and she came down to speak to him. She let him out, sir. She will know who he was, and how long he stayed."

She waited a moment to be asked any more questions, but she was not, so she went away.

A minute afterwards, Mr. Openshaw made as though he were going out of the room; but his wife laid her hand on his arm:

"Do not speak to her before the children," she said, in her low, quiet voice. "I will go up and question her."

"No! I must speak to her. You must know," said he, turning to his uncle and aunt, "my missus has an old servant, as faithful as ever woman was, I do believe, as far as love goes,—but at the same time, who does not always speak truth, as even the missus must allow. Now, my notion is, that this Norah of ours has been come over by some good-for-nothing chap (for she's at the time o' life when they say women pray for husbands—'any, good Lord, any,') and has let him into our house, and the chap has made off with your brooch, and m'appen many another thing beside. It's only saying that Norah is soft-hearted, and doesn't stick at a white lie—that's all, missus."

It was curious to notice how his tone, his eyes, his whole face was changed, as he spoke to his wife; but he was the resolute man through all. She knew better than to oppose him; so she went up-stairs, and told Norah her master wanted to speak to her, and that she would take care of the children in the meanwhile.

Norah rose to go, without a word. Her thoughts were these:

"If they tear me to pieces, they shall never know through me. He may come,—and then, just Lord have mercy upon us all! for some of us are dead folk to a certainty. But *he* shall do it; not me."

You may fancy, now, her look of determination, as

she faced her master alone in the dining-room; Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick having left the affair in their nephew's hands, seeing that he took it up with such vehemence.

"Norah! Who was that man that came to my house last night?"

"Man, sir!" As if infinitely surprised; but it was only to gain time.

"Yes; the man that Mary let in; that she went up-stairs to the nursery to tell you about; that you came down to speak to; the same chap, I make no doubt, that you took into the nursery to have your talk out with; the one Ailsie saw, and afterwards dreamed about; thinking, poor wench! she saw him say his prayers, when nothing, I'll be bound, was further from his thoughts; the one that took Mrs. Chadwick's brooch, value ten pounds. Now, Norah! Don't go off. I'm as sure, as my name's Thomas Openshaw, that you knew nothing of this robbery. But I do think you've been imposed on, and that's the truth. Some good-for-nothing chap has been making up to you, and you've been just like all other women, and have turned a soft place in your heart to him; and he came last night a-lovying, and you had him up in the nursery, and he made use of his opportunities, and made off with a few things on his way down! Come,

now, Norah : it's no blame to you, only you must not be such a fool again ! Tell us," he continued, "what name he gave you, Norah. I'll be bound, it was not the right one ; but it will be a clue for the police."

Norah drew herself up. "You may ask that question, and taunt me with my being single, and with my credulity, as you will, Master Openshaw. You'll get no answer from me. As for the brooch, and the story of theft and burglary ; if any friend ever came to see me (which I defy you to prove, and deny), he'd be just as much above doing such a thing as you yourself, Mr. Openshaw—and more so too ; for I'm not at all sure as everything you have is rightly come by, or would be yours long, if every man had his own." She meant, of course, his wife ; but he understood her to refer to his property in goods and chattels.

"Now, my good woman," said he, "I'll just tell you truly, I never trusted you out and out ; but my wife liked you, and I thought you had many a good point about you. If you once begin to sauce me, I'll have the police to you, and get out the truth in a court of justice, if you'll not tell it me quietly and civilly here. Now, the best thing you can do, is quietly to tell me who the fellow is. Look here ! a man comes to my house ; asks for you ; you take him up-stairs ; a valuable brooch is missing next day ; we know that you,

and Mary, and cook, are honest ; but you refuse to tell us who the man is. Indeed, you've told one lie already about him, saying no one was here last night. Now, I just put it to you, what do you think a policeman would say to this, or a magistrate? A magistrate would soon make you tell the truth, my good woman."

"There's never the creature born that should get it out of me," said Norah. "Not unless I choose to tell."

"I've a great mind to see," said Mr. Openshaw, growing angry at the defiance. Then, checking himself, he thought before he spoke again :

"Norah, for your missus's sake I don't want to go to extremities. Be a sensible woman, if you can. It's no great disgrace, after all, to have been taken in. I ask you once more—as a friend—who was this man that you let into my house last night?"

No answer. He repeated the question in an impatient tone. Still no answer. Norah's lips were set in determination not to speak.

"Then there is but one thing to be done. I shall send for a policeman."

"You will not," said Norah, starting forward. "You shall not, sir! No policeman shall touch me. I know nothing of the brooch, but I know this: ever since I was four-and-twenty, I have thought more of

your wife than of myself: ever since I saw her, a poor motherless girl, put upon in her uncle's house, I have thought more of serving her than of serving myself! I have cared for her and her child, as nobody ever cared for me. I don't cast blame on you, sir, but I say it's ill giving up one's life to any one; for, at the end, they will turn round upon you, and forsake you. Why does not my missus come herself to suspect me? Maybe, she is gone for the police? But I don't stay here, either for police, or magistrate, or master. You're an unlucky lot. I believe there's a curse on you. I'll leave you this very day. Yes! I'll leave that poor Ailsie, too. I will! No good will ever come to you!"

Mr. Openshaw was utterly astonished at this speech; most of which was completely unintelligible to him, as may easily be supposed. Before he could make up his mind what to say, or what to do, Norah had left the room. I do not think he had ever really intended to send for the police to this old servant of his wife's; for he had never for a moment doubted her perfect honesty. But he had intended to compel her to tell him who the man was, and in this he was baffled. He was, consequently, much irritated. He returned to his uncle and aunt in a state of great annoyance and perplexity, and told them he could get nothing out of

the woman ; that some man had been in the house the night before ; but that she refused to tell who he was. At this moment his wife came in, greatly agitated, and asked what had happened to Norah ; for that she had put on her things in passionate haste, and left the house.

"This looks suspicious," said Mr. Chadwick. "It is not the way in which an honest person would have acted."

Mr. Openshaw kept silence. He was sorely perplexed. But Mrs. Openshaw turned round on Mr. Chadwick, with a sudden fierceness no one ever saw in her before.

"You don't know Norah, uncle ! She is gone because she is deeply hurt at being suspected. Oh, I wish I had seen her—that I had spoken to her myself. She would have told me anything." Alice wrung her hands.

"I must confess," continued Mr. Chadwick to his nephew, in a lower voice, "I can't make you out. You used to be a word and a blow, and oftenest the blow first ; and now, when there is every cause for suspicion, you just do nought. Your missus is a very good woman, I grant ; but she may have been put upon as well as other folk, I suppose. If you don't send for the police, I shall."

"Very well," replied Mr. Openshaw, surlily. "I can't clear Norah. She won't clear herself, as I believe she might if she would. Only I wash my hands of it; for I am sure the woman herself is honest, and she's lived a long time with my wife, and I don't like her to come to shame."

"But she will then be forced to clear herself. That, at any rate, will be a good thing."

"Very well, very well! I am heart-sick of the whole business. Come, Alice, come up to the babies; they'll be in a sore way. I tell you, uncle," he said, turning round once more to Mr. Chadwick, suddenly and sharply, after his eye had fallen on Alice's wan, tearful, anxious face; "I'll have no sending for the police, after all. I'll buy my aunt twice as handsome a brooch this very day; but I'll not have Norah suspected, and my missus plagued. There's for you!"

He and his wife left the room. Mr. Chadwick quietly waited till he was out of hearing, and then said to his wife, "For all Tom's heroics, I'm just quietly going for a detective, wench. Thou need'st know nought about it."

He went to the police-station, and made a statement of the case. He was gratified by the impression which the evidence against Norah seemed to make. The men all agreed in his opinion, and steps were to

be immediately taken to find out where she was. Most probably, as they suggested, she had gone at once to the man, who, to all appearance, was her lover. When Mr. Chadwick asked how they would find her out, they smiled, shook their heads, and spoke of mysterious but infallible weys and means. He returned to his nephew's house with a very comfortable opinion of his own sagacity. He was met by his wife with a penitent face :

“O master, I've found my brooch! It was just sticking by its pin in the flounce of my brown silk, that I wore yesterday. I took it off in a hurry, and it must have caught in it: and I hung up my gown in the closet. Just now, when I was going to fold it up, there was the brooch! I'm very vexed, but I never dreamt but what it was lost!”

Her husband muttering something very like “Confound thee and thy brooch too! I wish I'd never given it thee,” snatched up his hat, and rushed back to the station, hoping to be in time to stop the police from searching for Norah. But a detective was already gone off on the errand.

Where was Norah? Half mad with the strain of the fearful secret, she had hardly slept through the night for thinking what must be done. Upon this terrible state of mind had come Ailsie's questions,

showing that she had seen the Man, as the unconscious child called her father. Lastly came the suspicion of her honesty. She was little less than crazy as she ran up stairs and dashed on her bonnet and shawl ; leaving all else, even her purse, behind her. In that house she would not stay. That was all she knew or was clear about. She would not even see the children again, for fear it should weaken her. She dreaded above everything Mr. Frank's return to claim his wife. She could not tell what remedy there was for a sorrow so tremendous, for her to stay to witness. The desire of escaping from the coming event was a stronger motive for her departure, than her soreness about the suspicions directed against her ; although this last had been the final goad to the course she took. She walked away almost at headlong speed ; sobbing as she went, as she had not dared to do during the past night for fear of exciting wonder in those who might hear her. Then she stopped. An idea came into her mind that she would leave London altogether, and betake herself to her native town of Liverpool. She felt in her pocket for her purse, as she drew near the Euston Square station with this intention. She had left it at home. Her poor head aching, her eyes swollen with crying, she had to stand still, and think, as well as she could, where next she should bend her

steps. Suddenly the thought flashed into her mind, that she would go and find out poor Mr. Frank. She had been hardly kind to him the night before, though her heart had bled for him ever since. She remembered his telling her, when she inquired for his address, almost as she had pushed him out of the door, of some hotel in a street not far distant from Euston Square. Thither she went: with what intention she scarcely knew, but to assuage her conscience by telling him how much she pitied him. In her present state she felt herself unfit to counsel, or restrain, or assist, or do aught else but sympathise and weep. The people of the inn said such a person had been there; had arrived only the day before; had gone out soon after his arrival, leaving his luggage in their care; but had never come back. Norah asked for leave to sit down, and await the gentleman's return. The landlady—pretty secure in the deposit of luggage against any probable injury—showed her into a room, and quietly locked the door on the outside. Norah was utterly worn out, and fell asleep—a shivering, starting, uneasy slumber, which lasted for hours.

The detective, meanwhile, had come up with her some time before she entered the hotel, into which he followed her. Asking the landlady to detain her for an hour or so, without giving any reason beyond

showing his authority (which made the landlady applaud herself a good deal for having locked her in), he went back to the police-station to report his proceedings. He could have taken her directly; but his object was, if possible, to trace out the man who was supposed to have committed the robbery. Then he heard of the discovery of the brooch; and consequently did not care to return.

Norah slept till even the summer evening began to close in. Then started up. Some one was at the door. It would be Mr. Frank; and she dizzily pushed back her ruffled grey hair, which had fallen over her eyes, and stood looking to see him. Instead, there came in Mr. Openshaw and a policeman.

"This is Norah Kennedy," said Mr. Openshaw.

"O, sir," said Norah, "I did not touch the brooch; indeed I did not. O, sir, I cannot live to be thought so badly of;" and very sick and faint, she suddenly sank down on the ground. To her surprise, Mr. Openshaw raised her up very tenderly. Even the policeman helped to lay her on the sofa; and, at Mr. Openshaw's desire, he went for some wine and sandwiches; for the poor gaunt woman lay there almost as if dead with weariness and exhaustion.

"Norah," said Mr. Openshaw, in his kindest voice, "the brooch is found. It was hanging to Mrs.

Chadwick's gown. I beg your pardon. Most truly I beg your pardon, for having troubled you about it. My wife is almost broken-hearted. Eat, Norah,—or, stay, first drink this glass of wine," said he, lifting her head, and pouring a little down her throat.

As she drank, she remembered where she was, and who she was waiting for. She suddenly pushed Mr Openshaw away, saying, "O, sir, you must go. You must not stop a minute. If he comes back, he will kill you."

"Alas, Norah! I do not know who 'he' is. But some one is gone away who will never come back: some one who knew you, and whom I am afraid you cared for."

"I don't understand you, sir," said Norah, her master's kind and sorrowful manner bewildering her yet more than his words. The policeman had left the room at Mr. Openshaw's desire, and they two were alone.

"You know what I mean, when I say some one is gone who will never come back. I mean that he is dead!"

"Who?" said Norah, trembling all over.

"A poor man has been found in the Thames this morning—drowned."

"Did he drown himself?" asked Norah, solemnly.

"God only knows," replied Mr. Openshaw, in the same tone. "Your name and address at our house were found in his pocket: that, and his purse, were the only things that were found upon him. I am sorry to say it, my poor Norah; but you are required to go and identify him."

"To what?" asked Norah.

"To say who it is. It is always done, in order that some reason may be discovered for the suicide—if suicide it was.—I make no doubt, he was the man who came to see you at our house last night.—It is very sad, I know." He made pauses between each little clause, in order to try and bring back her senses, which he feared were wandering—so wild and sad was her look.

"Master Openshaw," said she, at last, "I've a dreadful secret to tell you—only you must never breathe it to any one, and you and I must bide it away for ever. I thought to have done it all by myself, but I see I cannot. Yon poor man—yes! the dead, drowned creature is, I fear, Mr. Frank, my mistress's first husband!"

Mr. Openshaw sat down, as if shot. He did not speak; but, after a while, he signed to Norah to go on.

"He came to me the other night—when—God

be thanked! you were all away at Richmond. He asked me if his wife was dead or alive. I was a brute, and thought more of your all coming home than of his sore trial: I spoke out sharp, and said she was married again, and very content and happy: I all but turned him away: and now he lies dead and cold."

"God forgive me!" said Mr. Openshaw.

"God forgive us all!" said Norah. "Yon poor man needs forgiveness, perhaps, less than any one among us. He had been among the savages—shipwrecked—I know not what—and he had written letters which had never reached my poor missus."

"He saw his child!"

"He saw her—yes! I took him up, to give his thoughts another start; for I believed he was going mad on my hands. I came to seek him here, as I more than half promised. My mind misgave me when I heard he never came in. O, sir! it must be him!"

Mr. Openshaw rang the bell. Norah was almost too much stunned to wonder at what he did. He asked for writing materials, wrote a letter, and then said to Norah:

"I am writing to Alice, to say I shall be unavoidably absent for a few days; that I have found you; that you are well, and send her your love, and will come home to-morrow. You must go with me to the

Police Court; you must identify the body; I will pay high to keep names and details out of the papers."

"But where are you going, sir?"

He did not answer her directly. Then he said:

"Norah! I must go with you, and look on the face of the man whom I have so injured,—unwittingly, it is true; but it seems to me as if I had killed him. I will lay his head in the grave, as if he were my only brother: and how he must have hated me! I cannot go home to my wife till all that I can do for him is done. Then I go with a dreadful secret on my mind. I shall never speak of it again, after these days are over. I know you will not, either." He shook hands with her: and they never named the subject again, the one to the other.

Norah went home to Alice the next day. Not a word was said on the cause of her abrupt departure a day or two before. Alice had been charged by her husband, in his letter, not to allude to the supposed theft of the brooch; so she, implicitly obedient to those whom she loved both by nature and habit, was entirely silent on the subject, only treated Norah with the most tender respect, as if to make up for unjust suspicion.

Nor did Alice inquire into the reason why Mr. Openshaw had been absent during his uncle and aunt's visit, after he had once said that it was unavoid-

able. He came back grave and quiet ; and from that time forth was curiously changed. More thoughtful, and perhaps less active ; quite as decided in conduct, but with new and different rules for the guidance of that conduct. Towards Alice he could hardly be more kind than he had always been ; but he now seemed to look upon her as some one sacred, and to be treated with reverence, as well as tenderness. He thrived in business, and made a large fortune, one half of which was settled upon her.

Long years after these events—a few months after her mother died—Ailsie and her “father” (as she always called Mr. Openshaw), drove to a cemetery a little way out of town, and she was carried to a certain mound by her maid, who was then sent back to the carriage. There was a head-stone, with F. W. and a date upon it. That was all. Sitting by the grave, Mr. Openshaw told her the story ; and for the sad fate of that poor father whom she had never seen, he shed the only tears she ever saw fall from his eyes.

LOIS THE WITCH.

CHAPTER I.

IN the year 1691, Lois Barclay stood on a little wooden pier, steadying herself on the stable land, in much the same manner as, eight or nine weeks ago, she had tried to steady herself on the deck of the rocking ship which had carried her across from Old to New England. It seemed as strange now to be on solid earth as it had been, not long ago, to be rocked by the sea, both by day and by night; and the aspect of the land was equally strange. The forests which showed in the distance all round, and which, in truth, were not very far from the wooden houses forming the town of Boston, were of different shades of green, and different, too, in shape of outline to those which Lois Barclay knew well in her old home in Warwickshire. Her heart sank a little as she stood alone, waiting for the captain of the good ship Redemption, the kind,

rough old sailor, who was her only known friend in this unknown continent. Captain Holdernessee was busy, however, as she saw, and it would probably be some time before he would be ready to attend to her ; so Lois sat down on one of the casks that lay about, and wrapped her grey duffle cloak tight around her, and sheltered herself under her hood, as well as might be, from the piercing wind, which seemed to follow those whom it had tyrannized over at sea with a dogged wish of still tormenting them on land. Very patiently did Lois sit there, although she was weary, and shivering with cold ; for the day was severe for May, and the *Redemption*, with store of necessaries and comforts for the Puritan colonists of New England, was the earliest ship that had ventured across the seas.

How could Lois help thinking of the past, and speculating on the future, as she sat on Boston pier, at this breathing-time of her life ? In the dim sea-mist which she gazed upon with aching eyes (filled, against her will, with tears, from time to time), there rose the little village church of Barford (not three miles from Warwick—you may see it yet), where her father had preached ever since 1661, long before she was born. He and her mother both lay dead in Barford churchyard ; and the old low grey church could hardly come before her vision without her

seeing the old parsonage too, the cottage covered with Austrian roses, and yellow jessamine, where she had been born, sole child of parents already long past the prime of youth. She saw the path, not a hundred yards long, from the parsonage to the vestry door : that path which her father trod daily ; for the vestry was his study, and the sanctum, where he pored over the ponderous tomes of the Fathers, and compared their precepts with those of the authorities of the Anglican Church of that day—the day of the later Stuarts ; for Barford Parsonage at that time scarcely exceeded in size and dignity the cottages by which it was surrounded : it only contained three rooms on a floor, and was but two stories high. On the first, or ground floor, were the parlour, kitchen, and back or working kitchen ; up-stairs, Mr. and Mrs. Barclay's room, that belonging to Lois, and the maid-servant's room. If a guest came, Lois left her own chamber, and shared old Clemence's bed. But those days were over. Never more should Lois see father or mother on earth ; they slept, calm and still, in Barford churchyard, careless of what became of their orphan child, as far as earthly manifestations of care or love went. And Clemence lay there too, bound down in her grassy bed by withes of the briar-rose, which Lois had trained over those three precious graves before leaving England for ever.

There were some who would fain have kept her there; one who swore in his heart a great oath unto the Lord that he would seek her sooner or later, if she was still upon the earth. But he was the rich heir and only son of the Miller Lucy, whose mill stood by the Avon-side in the grassy Barford meadows, and his father looked higher for him than the penniless daughter of Parson Barclay (so low were clergymen esteemed in those days!); and the very suspicion of Hugh Lucy's attachment to Lois Barclay made his parents think it more prudent not to offer the orphan a home, although none other of the parishioners had the means, even if they had the will, to do so.

So Lois swallowed her tears down till the time came for crying, and acted upon her mother's words:

"Lois, thy father is dead of this terrible fever, and I am dying. Nay, it is so, though I am easier from pain for these few hours, the Lord be praised! The cruel men of the Commonwealth have left thee very friendless. Thy father's only brother was shot down at Edgehill. I, too, have a brother, though thou hast never heard me speak of him, for he was a schismatic; and thy father and he had words, and he left for that new country beyond the seas, without ever saying farewell to us. But Ralph was a kind lad until he took up these new-fangled notions, and for the old

days' sake he will take thee in, and love thee as a child, and place thee among his children. Blood is thicker than water. Write to him as soon as I am gone—for Lois, I am going—and I bless the Lord that has letten me join my husband again so soon." Such was the selfishness of conjugal love; she thought little of Lois's desolation in comparison with her rejoicing over her speedy reunion with her dead husband! "Write to thine uncle, Ralph Hickson, Salem, New England (put it down, child, on thy tablets), and say that I, Henrietta Barclay, charge him, for the sake of all he holds dear in heaven or on earth,—for his salvation's sake, as well as for the sake of the old home at Lester-bridge,—for the sake of the father and mother that gave us birth, as well as for the sake of the six little children who lie dead between him and me,—that he take thee into his home as if thou wert his own flesh and blood, as indeed thou art. He has a wife and children of his own, and no one need fear having thee, my Lois, my darling, my baby, among his household. Oh, Lois, would that thou wert dying with me! The thought of thee makes death sore!" Lois comforted her mother more than herself, poor child, by promises to obey her dying wishes to the letter, and by expressing hopes she dared not feel of her uncle's kindness.

"Promise me"—the dying woman's breath came harder and harder—"that thou wilt go at once. The money our goods will bring—the letter thy father wrote to Captain Holderness, his old schoolfellow—thou knowest all I would say—my Lois, God bless thee!"

Solemnly did Lois promise; strictly she kept her word. It was all the more easy, for Hugh Lucy met her, and told her, in one great burst of love, of his passionate attachment, his vehement struggles with his father, his impotence at present, his hopes and resolves for the future. And, intermingled with all this, came such outrageous threats and expressions of uncontrolled vehemence, that Lois felt that in Barford she must not linger to be a cause of desperate quarrel between father and son, while her absence might soften down matters, so that either the rich old miller might relent, or—and her heart ached to think of the other possibility—Hugh's love might cool, and the dear playfellow of her childhood learn to forget. If not—if Hugh were to be trusted in one tithe of what he said—God might permit him to fulfil his resolve of coming to seek her out before many years were over. It was all in God's hands, and that was best, thought Lois Barclay.

She was roused out of her trance of recollections by Captain Holderness, who, having done all that was necessary in the way of orders and directions to his

mate, now came up to her, and, praising her for her quiet patience, told her that he would now take her to the Widow Smith's, a decent kind of house, where he and many other sailors of the better order were in the habit of lodging, during their stay on the New England shores. Widow Smith, he said, had a parlour for herself and her daughters, in which Lois might sit, while he went about the business that, as he had told her, would detain him in Boston for a day or two, before he could accompany her to her uncle's at Salem. All this had been to a certain degree arranged on ship-board ; but Captain Holderness, for want of anything else that he could think of to talk about, recapitulated it as he and Lois walked along. It was his way of showing sympathy with the emotion that made her grey eyes full of tears, as she started up from the pier at the sound of his voice. In his heart he said, "Poor wench ! poor wench ! it's a strange land to her, and they are all strange folks, and, I reckon, she will be feeling desolate. I'll try and cheer her up." So he talked on about hard facts, connected with the life that lay before her, until they reached Widow Smith's ; and perhaps Lois was more brightened by this style of conversation, and the new ideas it presented to her, than she would have been by the tenderest woman's sympathy.

“They are a queer set, these New Englanders,” said Captain Holderness. “They are rare chaps for praying; down on their knees at every turn of their life. Folk are none so busy in a new country, else they would have to pray like me, with a ‘Yo-hoy!’ on each side of my prayers, and a rope cutting like fire through my hand. Yon pilot was for calling us all to thanksgiving for a good voyage, and lucky escape from the pirates; but I said I always put up my thanks on dry land, after I had got my ship into harbour. The French colonists, too, are vowing vengeance for the expedition against Canada, and the people here are raging like heathens—at least, as like as godly folk can be—for the loss of their charter. All that is the news the pilot told me; for, for all he wanted us to be thanksgiving instead of casting the lead, he was as down in the mouth as could be about the state of the country. But here we are at Widow Smith’s! Now, cheer up, and show the godly a pretty smiling Warwickshire lass!”

Anybody would have smiled at Widow Smith’s greeting. She was a comely, motherly woman, dressed in the primmest fashion in vogue twenty years before, in England, among the class to which she belonged. But, somehow, her pleasant face gave the lie to her dress; were it as brown and sober-coloured as could

be, folk remembered it bright and cheerful, because it was a part of Widow Smith herself.

She kissed Lois on both cheeks, before she rightly understood who the stranger maiden was, only because she was a stranger, and looked sad and forlorn ; and then she kissed her again, because Captain Holder-nesse commended her to the widow's good offices. And so she led Lois by the hand into her rough, substantial log-house, over the door of which hung a great bough of a tree, by way of sign of entertainment for man and horse. Yet not all men were received by Widow Smith. To some she could be as cold and reserved as need be, deaf to all inquiries save one—where else they could find accommodation? To this question she would give a ready answer, and speed the unwelcome guest on his way. Widow Smith was guided in these matters by instinct : one glance at a man's face told her whether or not she chose to have him as an inmate of the same house as her daughters ; and her promptness of decision in these matters gave her manner a kind of authority which no one liked to disobey, especially as she had stalwart neighbours within call to back her, if her assumed deafness in the first instance, and her voice and gesture in the second, were not enough to give the would-be guest his dismissal. Widow Smith chose her customers merely by

their physical aspect ; not one whit with regard to their apparent worldly circumstances. Those who had been staying at her house once, always came again, for she had the knack of making every one beneath her roof comfortable and at his ease. Her daughters, Prudence and Hester, had somewhat of their mother's gifts, but not in such perfection. They reasoned a little upon a stranger's appearance, instead of knowing at the first, moment whether they liked him or no ; they noticed the indications of his clothes, the quality and cut thereof, as telling somewhat of his station in society ; they were more reserved, they hesitated more than their mother ; they had not her prompt authority, her happy power. Their bread was not so light, their cream went sometimes to sleep when it should have been turning into butter, their hams were not always " just like the hams of the old country," as their mother's were invariably pronounced to be ; yet they were good, orderly, kindly girls, and rose and greeted Lois with a friendly shake of the hand, as their mother, with her arm round the stranger's waist, led her into the private room which she called her parlour. The aspect of this room was strange in the English girl's eyes. The logs of which the house was built, showed here and there through the mud plaster, although before both plaster and logs were hung the skins of many curious animals,

—skins presented to the widow by many a trader of her acquaintance, just as her sailor guests brought her another description of gift—shells, strings of wampum-beads, sea-birds' eggs, and presents from the old country. The room was more like a small museum of natural history of these days than a parlour ; and it had a strange, peculiar, but not unpleasant smell about it, neutralized in some degree by the smoke from the enormous trunk of pinewood which smouldered on the hearth.

The instant their mother told them that Captain Holderness was in the outer room, the girls began putting away their spinning-wheel and knitting-needles, and preparing for a meal of some kind ; what meal, Lois, sitting there and unconsciously watching, could hardly tell. First, dough was set to rise for cakes ; then came out of a corner cupboard—a present from England—an enormous square bottle of a cordial called Golden Wasser ; next, a mill for grinding chocolate—a rare unusual treat anywhere at that time ; then a great Cheshire cheese. Three venison steaks were cut ready for broiling, fat cold pork sliced up and treacle poured over it, a great pie something like a mince-pie, but which the daughters spoke of with honour as the “punken-pie,” fresh and salt fish brandered, oysters cooked in various ways. Lois wondered where would be the end of the provi-

sions for hospitably receiving the strangers from the old country. At length everything was placed on the table, the hot food smoking; but all was cool, not to say cold, before Elder Hawkins (an old neighbour of much repute and standing, who had been invited in by Widow Smith to hear the news) had finished his grace, into which was embodied thanksgivings for the past and prayers for the future lives of every individual present, adapted to their several cases, as far as the elder could guess at them from appearances. This grace might not have ended so soon as it did, had it not been for the somewhat impatient drumming of his knife-handle on the table with which Captain Holderness accompanied the latter half of the elder's words.

When they first sat down to their meal, all were too hungry for much talking; but as their appetites diminished their curiosity increased, and there was much to be told and heard on both sides. With all the English intelligence Lois was, of course, well acquainted; but she listened with natural attention to all that was said about the new country, and the new people among whom she had come to live. Her father had been a Jacobite, as the adherents of the Stuarts were beginning at this time to be called. His father, again, had been a follower of Archbishop Laud; so Lois had hitherto heard little of the conversation,

and seen little of the ways of the Puritans. Elder Hawkins was one of the strictest of the strict, and evidently his presence kept the two daughters of the house considerably in awe. But the widow herself was a privileged person; her known goodness of heart (the effects of which had been experienced by many) gave her the liberty of speech which was tacitly denied to many, under penalty of being esteemed ungodly if they infringed certain conventional limits. And Captain Holderness and his mate spoke out their minds, let who would be present. So that on this first landing in New England, Lois was, as it were, gently let down into the midst of the Puritan peculiarities, and yet they were sufficient to make her feel very lonely and strange.

The first subject of conversation was the present state of the colony—Lois soon found out that, although at the beginning she was not a little perplexed by the frequent reference to names of places which she naturally associated with the old country. Widow Smith was speaking: "In county of Essex the folk are ordered to keep four scouts, or companies of minute-men; six persons in each company; to be on the look-out for the wild Indians, who are for ever stirring about in the woods, stealthy brutes as they are! I am sure, I got such a fright the first harvest-

time after I came over to New England, I go on dreaming, now near twenty years after Lothrop's business, of painted Indians, with their shaven scalps and their war-streaks, lurking behind the trees, and coming nearer and nearer with their noiseless steps."

"Yes," broke in one of her daughters; "and, mother, don't you remember how Hannah Benson told us how her husband had cut down every tree near his house at Deerbrook, in order that no one might come near him, under cover; and how one evening she was a-sitting in the twilight, when all her family were gone to bed, and her husband gone off to Plymouth on business, and she saw a log of wood, just like a trunk of a felled tree, lying in the shadow, and thought nothing of it, till, on looking again a while after, she fancied it was come a bit nearer to the house, and how her heart turned sick with fright, and how she dared not stir at first, but shut her eyes while she counted a hundred, and looked again, and the shadow was deeper, but she could see that the log was nearer; so she ran in and bolted the door, and went up to where her eldest lad lay. It was Elijah, and he was but sixteen then; but he rose up at his mother's words, and took his father's long duck-gun down, and he tried the loading, and spoke for the first time to put up a prayer that God would give his aim good guidance, and went

to a window that gave a view upon the side where the log lay, and fired, and no one dared to look what came of it, but all the household read the Scriptures, and prayed the whole night long, till morning came and showed a long stream of blood lying on the grass close by the log, which the full sunlight showed to be no log at all, but just a Red Indian covered with bark, and painted most skilfully, with his war-knife by his side."

All were breathless with listening, though to most the story, or such like it, were familiar. Then another took up the tale of horror :

"And the pirates have been down at Marblehead since you were here, Captain Holderness. 'Twas only the last winter they landed,—French Papist pirates ; and the people kept close within their houses, for they knew not what would come of it ; and they dragged folk ashore. There was one woman among those folk—prisoners from some vessel, doubtless—and the pirates took them by force to the inland marsh ; and the Marblehead folk kept still and quiet, every gun loaded, and every ear on the watch, for who knew but what the wild sea-robbers might take a turn on land next ; and, in the dead of the night, they heard a woman's loud and pitiful outcry from the marsh, ' Lord Jesu ! have mercy on me ! Save me from the power of man, O Lord Jesu ! ' And the blood of all who

heard the cry ran cold with terror, till old Nance Hickson, who had been stone-deaf and bedridden for years, stood up in the midst of the folk all gathered together in her grandson's house, and said, that as they, the dwellers in Marblehead, had not had brave hearts or faith enough to go and succour the helpless, that cry of a dying woman should be in their ears, and in their children's ears, till the end of the world. And Nance dropped down dead as soon as she had made an end of speaking, and the pirates set sail from Marblehead at morning dawn; but the folk there hear the cry still, shrill and pitiful, from the waste marshes, 'Lord Jesu! have mercy on me! Save me from the power of man, O Lord Jesu!'"

"And by token," said Elder Hawkins's deep bass voice, speaking with the strong nasal twang of the Puritans (who, says Butler,

'Blasphemed custard through the nose),'

"godly Mr. Noyes ordained a fast at Marblehead, and preached a soul-stirring discourse on the words, 'Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye did it not unto me.' But it has been borne in upon me at times, whether the whole vision of the pirates and the cry of the woman was not a device of Satan's to sift the Marblehead folk, and see what fruit

their doctrine bore, and so to condemn them in the sight of the Lord. If it were so, the enemy had a great triumph, for assuredly it was no part of Christian men to leave a helpless woman unaided in her sore distress."

"But, Elder," said Widow Smith, "it was no vision; they were real living men who went ashore, men who broke down branches and left their footmarks on the ground."

"As for that matter, Satan hath many powers, and if it be the day when he is permitted to go about like a roaring lion, he will not stick at trifles, but make his work complete. I tell you, many men are spiritual enemies in visible forms, permitted to roam about the waste places of the earth. I myself believe that these Red Indians are indeed the evil creatures of whom we read in Holy Scripture; and there is no doubt that they are in league with those abominable Papists, the French people in Canada. I have heard tell, that the French pay the Indians so much gold for every dozen scalps off Englishmen's heads."

"Pretty cheerful talk this," said Captain Holder-ness to Lois, perceiving her blanched cheek and terror-stricken mien. "Thou art thinking that thou hadst better have stayed at Barford, I'll answer for it, wench. But the devil is not so black as he is painted."

“Ho! there again!” said Elder Hawkins. “The devil is painted, it hath been said so from old times; and are not these Indians painted, even like unto their father?”

“But is it all true?” asked Lois, aside, of Captain Holdernessee, letting the elder hold forth unheeded by her, though listened to, however, with the utmost reverence by the two daughters of the house.

“My wench,” said the old sailor, “thou hast come to a country where there are many perils, both from land and from sea. The Indians hate the white men. Whether other white men” (meaning the French away to the north) “have hounded on the savages, or whether the English have taken their lands and hunting-grounds without due recompense, and so raised the cruel vengeance of the wild creatures—who knows? But it is true that it is not safe to go far into the woods, for fear of the lurking painted savages; nor has it been safe to build a dwelling far from a settlement; and it takes a brave heart to make a journey from one town to another, and folk do say the Indian creatures rise up out of the very ground to waylay the English; and then others affirm they are all in league with Satan to affright the Christians out of the heathen country over which he has reigned so long. Then, again, the sea-shore is infested by pirates, the scum of all nations:

they land, and plunder, and ravage, and burn, and destroy. Folk get affrighted of the real dangers, and in their fright imagine, perchance, dangers that are not. But who knows? Holy Scripture speaks of witches and wizards, and of the power of the Evil One in desert places; and even in the old country we have heard tell of those who have sold their souls for ever for the little power they get for a few years on earth."

By this time the whole table was silent, listening to the captain; it was just one of those chance silences that sometimes occur, without any apparent reason, and often without any apparent consequence. But all present had reason, before many months had passed over, to remember the words which Lois spoke in answer, although her voice was low, and she only thought, in the interest of the moment, of being heard by her old friend the captain.

"They are fearful creatures, the witches! and yet I am sorry for the poor old women, whilst I dread them. We had one in Barford, when I was a little child. No one knew whence she came, but she settled herself down in a mud hut by the common side; and there she lived, she and her cat." (At the mention of the cat, Elder Hawkins shook his head long and gloomily.) "No one knew how she lived, if it were not on nettles and scraps of oatmeal and such-like

food given her more for fear than for pity. She went double, always talking and muttering to herself. Folk said she snared birds and rabbits, in the thicket that came down to her hovel. How it came to pass I cannot say, but many a one fell sick in the village, and much cattle died one spring, when I was near four years old. I never heard much about it, for my father said it was ill talking about such things ; I only know I got a sick fright one afternoon, when the maid had gone out for milk and had taken me with her, and we were passing a meadow where the Avon, circling, makes a deep round pool, and there was a crowd of folk, all still—and a still, breathless crowd makes the heart beat worse than a shouting, noisy one. They were all gazing towards the water, and the maid held me up in her arms to see the sight above the shoulders of the people ; and I saw old Hannah in the water, her grey hair all streaming down her shoulders, and her face bloody and black with the stones and the mud they had been throwing at her, and her cat tied round her neck. I hid my face, I know, as soon as I saw the fearsome sight, for her eyes met mine as they were glaring with fury—poor, helpless, baited creature!—and she caught the sight of me, and cried out, ‘Parson’s wench, parson’s wench, yonder, in thy nurse’s arms, thy dad hath never tried for to save me, and

none shall save thee when thou art brought up for a witch.' Oh! the words rang in my ears, when I was dropping asleep, for years after. I used to dream that I was in that pond, all men hating me with their eyes because I was a witch; and, at times, her black cat used to seem living again, and say over those dreadful words."

Lois stopped: the two daughters looked at her excitement with a kind of shrinking surprise, for the tears were in her eyes. Elder Hawkins shook his head, and muttered texts from Scripture; but cheerful Widow Smith, not liking the gloomy turn of the conversation, tried to give it a lighter cast by saying, "And I don't doubt but what the parson's bonny lass has bewitched many a one since, with her dimples and her pleasant ways—eh, Captain Holdernessee? It's you must tell us tales of this young lass's doings in England."

"Ay, ay," said the captain, "there's one under her charms in Warwickshire who will never get the better of it, I'm thinking."

Elder Hawkins rose to speak; he stood leaning on his hands, which were placed on the table: "Brethren," said he, "I must upbraid you if ye speak lightly; charms and witchcraft are evil things. I trust this maiden hath had nothing to do with them, even in

thought. But my mind misgives me at her story. The hellish witch might have power from Satan to infect her mind, she being yet a child, with the deadly sin. Instead of vain talking, I call upon you all to join with me in prayer for this stranger in our land, that her heart may be purged from all iniquity. Let us pray."

"Come, there's no harm in that," said the captain; "but, Elder Hawkins, when you are at work, just pray for us all, for I am afeard there be some of us need purging from iniquity a good deal more than Lois Barclay, and a prayer for a man never does mis-chief."

Captain Holderness had business in Boston which detained him there for a couple of days, and during that time Lois remained with the Widow Smith, seeing what was to be seen of the new land that contained her future home. The letter of her dying mother was sent off to Salem, meanwhile, by a lad going thither, in order to prepare her Uncle Ralph Hickson for his niece's coming, as soon as Captain Holderness could find leisure to take her; for he considered her given into his own personal charge, until he could consign her to her uncle's care. When the time came for going to Salem, Lois felt very sad at leaving the kindly woman under whose roof she had

been staying, and looked back as long as she could see anything of Widow Smith's dwelling. She was packed into a rough kind of country cart, which just held her and Captain Holderness, beside the driver. There was a basket of provisions under their feet, and behind them hung a bag of provender for the horse; for it was a good day's journey to Salem, and the road was reputed so dangerous that it was ill tarrying a minute longer than necessary for refreshment. English roads were bad enough at that period and for long after, but in America the way was simply the cleared ground of the forest; the stumps of the felled trees still remaining in the direct line, forming obstacles, which it required the most careful driving to avoid; and in the hollows, where the ground was swampy, the pulpy nature of it was obviated by logs of wood laid across the boggy part. The deep green forest, tangled into heavy darkness even thus early in the year, came within a few yards of the road all the way, though efforts were regularly made by the inhabitants of the neighbouring settlements to keep a certain space clear on each side, for fear of the lurking Indians, who might otherwise come upon them unawares. The cries of strange birds, the unwonted colour of some of them, all suggested to the imaginative or unaccustomed traveller the idea of war-whoops and painted deadly

enemies. But at last they drew near to Salem, which rivalled Boston in size in those days, and boasted the name of one or two streets, although to an English eye they looked rather more like irregularly built houses, clustered round the meeting-house, or rather one of the meeting-houses, for a second was in process of building. The whole place was surrounded with two circles of stockades ; between the two were the gardens and grazing ground for those who dreaded their cattle straying into the woods, and the consequent danger of reclaiming them.

The lad who drove them flogged his spent horse into a trot, as they went through Salem to Ralph Hickson's house. It was evening, the leisure time for the inhabitants, and their children were at play before the houses. Lois was struck by the beauty of one wee toddling child, and turned to look after it ; it caught its little foot in a stump of wood, and fell with a cry that brought the mother out in affright, As she ran out, her eye caught Lois's anxious gaze, although the noise of the heavy wheels drowned the sound of her words of inquiry as to the nature of the hurt the child had received. Nor had Lois time to think long upon the matter, for the instant after, the horse was pulled up at the door of a good, square, substantial wooden house, plastered over into a creamy white, perhaps as

handsome a house as any in Salem ; and there she was told by the driver that her uncle, Ralph Hickson, lived. In the flurry of the moment she did not notice, but Captain Holderness did, that no one came out at the unwonted sound of wheels, to receive and welcome her. She was lifted down by the old sailor, and led into a large room, almost like the hall of some English manor-house as to size. A tall, gaunt young man of three or four and twenty, sat on a bench by one of the windows, reading a great folio by the fading light of day. He did not rise when they came in, but looked at them with surprise, no gleam of intelligence coming into his stern, dark face. There was no woman in the house-place. Captain Holderness paused a moment, and then said :

“ Is this house Ralph Hickson’s ? ”

“ It is,” said the young man, in a slow, deep voice. But he added no word further.

“ This is his niece, Lois Barclay,” said the captain, taking the girl’s arm, and pushing her forwards. The young man looked at her steadily and gravely for a minute ; then rose, and carefully marking the page in the folio which hitherto had lain open upon his knee, said, still in the same heavy, indifferent manner, “ I will call my mother, she will know.”

He opened a door which looked into a warm bright

kitchen, ruddy with the light of the fire over which three women were apparently engaged in cooking something, while a fourth, an old Indian woman, of a greenish-brown colour, shrivelled up and bent with apparent age, moved backwards and forwards, evidently fetching the others the articles they required.

"Mother," said the young man ; and having arrested her attention, he pointed over his shoulder to the newly-arrived strangers, and returned to the study of his book, from time to time, however, furtively examining Lois from beneath his dark shaggy eyebrows.

A tall, largely made woman, past middle life, came in from the kitchen, and stood reconnoitring the strangers.

Captain Holderness spoke.

"This is Lois Barclay, Master Ralph Hickson's niece."

"I know nothing of her," said the mistress of the house, in a deep voice, almost as masculine as her son's.

"Master Hickson received his sister's letter, did he not? I sent it off myself by a lad named Elias Wellcome, who left Boston for this place yesterday morning."

"Ralph Hickson has received no such letter. He lies bedridden in the chamber beyond. Any letters

for him must come through my hands; wherefore I can affirm with certainty that no such letter has been delivered here. His sister Barclay, she that was Henrietta Hickson, and whose husband took the oaths to Charles Stuart, and stuck by his living when all godly men left theirs——”

Lois, who had thought her heart was dead and cold a minute before at the ungracious reception she had met with, felt words come up into her mouth at the implied insult to her father, and spoke out, to her own and the captain's astonishment :

“They might be godly men who left their churches on that day of which you speak, madam; but they alone were not the godly men, and no one has a right to limit true godliness for mere opinion's sake.”

“Well said, lass,” spoke out the captain, looking round upon her with a kind of admiring wonder, and patting her on the back.

Lois and her aunt gazed into each other's eyes unflinchingly, for a minute or two of silence; but the girl felt her colour coming and going, while the elder woman's never varied; and the eyes of the young maiden were filling fast with tears, while those of Grace Hickson kept on their stare, dry and unwavering.

“Mother!” said the young man, rising up with a

quicker motion than any one had yet used in this house, "it is ill speaking of such matters when my cousin comes first among us. The Lord may give her grace hereafter, but she has travelled from Boston city to-day, and she and this seafaring man must need rest and food."

He did not attend to see the effect of his words, but sat down again, and seemed to be absorbed in his book in an instant. Perhaps he knew that his word was law with his grim mother, for he had hardly ceased speaking before she had pointed to a wooden settle; and smoothing the lines on her countenance, she said, "What Manasseh says is true. Sit down here, while I bid Faith and Nattee get food ready; and meanwhile I will go tell my husband, that one who calls herself his sister's child is come over to pay him a visit."

She went to the door leading into the kitchen, and gave some directions to the elder girl, whom Lois now knew to be the daughter of the house. Faith stood impassive, while her mother spoke, scarcely caring to look at the newly-arrived strangers. She was like her brother Manasseh in complexion, but had handsomer features, and large, mysterious-looking eyes, as Lois saw, when once she lifted them up, and took in, as it were, the aspect of the sea-captain and her cousin

with one swift searching look. About the stiff, tall, angular mother, and the scarce less pliant figure of the daughter, a girl of twelve years old, or thereabouts, played all manner of impish antics, unheeded by them, as if it were her accustomed habit to peep about, now under their arms, now at this side, now at that, making grimaces all the while at Lois and Captain Holderness, who sat facing the door, weary, and somewhat disheartened by their reception. The captain pulled out tobacco, and began to chew it by way of consolation; but in a moment or two, his usual elasticity of spirit came to his rescue, and he said in a low voice to Lois:

“That scoundrel Elias, I will give it him! If the letter had but been delivered, thou wouldst have had a different kind of welcome; but as soon as I have had some victuals, I will go out and find the lad, and bring back the letter, and that will make all right, my wench. Nay, don’t be downhearted, for I cannot stand women’s tears. Thou’rt just worn out with the shaking and the want of food.”

Lois brushed away her tears, and looking round to try and divert her thoughts by fixing them on present objects, she caught her cousin Manasseh’s deep-set eyes furtively watching her. It was with no unfriendly gaze, yet it made Lois uncomfortable, particularly as

he did not withdraw his looks after he must have seen that she observed him. She was glad when her aunt called her into an inner room to see her uncle, and she escaped from the steady observance of her gloomy, silent cousin.

Ralph Hickson was much older than his wife, and his illness made him look older still. He had never had the force of character that Grace, his spouse, possessed, and age and sickness had now rendered him almost childish at times. But his nature was affectionate, and stretching out his trembling arms from where he lay bedridden, he gave Lois an unhesitating welcome, never waiting for the confirmation of the missing letter before he acknowledged her to be his niece.

“Oh! ’tis kind in thee to come all across the sea to make acquaintance with thine uncle; kind in Sister Barclay to spare thee!”

Lois had to tell him that there was no one living to miss her at home in England; that in fact she had no home in England, no father nor mother left upon earth; and that she had been bidden by her mother’s last words to seek him out, and ask him for a home. Her words came up, half choked from a heavy heart, and his dulled wits could not take their meaning in without several repetitions; and then he cried like a

child, rather at his own loss of a sister, whom he had not seen for more than twenty years, than at that of the orphan's standing before him, trying hard not to cry, but to start bravely in this new strange home. What most of all helped Lois in her self-restraint was her aunt's unsympathetic look. Born and bred in New England, Grace Hickson had a kind of jealous dislike to her husband's English relations, which had increased since of late years his weakened mind yearned after them, and he forgot the good reason he had had for his self-exile, and moaned over the decision which had led to it as the great mistake of his life. "Come," said she, "it strikes me that, in all this sorrow for the loss of one who died full of years, ye are forgetting in Whose hands life and death are!"

True words, but ill-spoken at that time. Lois looked up at her with a scarcely disguised indignation; which increased as she heard the contemptuous tone in which her aunt went on talking to Elias Hickson, even while she was arranging his bed with a regard to his greater comfort.

"One would think thou wert a godless man, by the moan thou art always making over spilt milk; and truth is, thou art but childish in thine old age. When we were wed, thou left all things to the Lord; I would never have married thee else. Nay, lass," said she,

catching the expression on Lois's face, "thou art never going to browbeat me with thine angry looks. I do my duty as I read it, and there is never a man in Salem that dare speak a word to Grace Hickson about either her works or her faith. Godly Mr. Cotton Mather hath said, that even he might learn of me; and I would advise thee rather to humble thyself, and see if the Lord may not convert thee from thy ways, since he has sent thee to dwell, as it were, in Zion, where the precious dew falls daily on Aaron's beard."

Lois felt ashamed and sorry to find that her aunt had so truly interpreted the momentary expression of her features; she blamed herself a little for the feeling that had caused that expression, trying to think how much her aunt might have been troubled with something before the unexpected irruption of the strangers, and again hoping that the remembrance of this little misunderstanding would soon pass away. So she endeavoured to reassure herself, and not to give way to her uncle's tender trembling pressure of her hand, as, at her aunt's bidding, she wished him good night, and returned into the outer, or "keeping"-room, where all the family were now assembled, ready for the meal of flour cakes and venison-steaks which Nattee, the Indian servant, was bringing in from the kitchen.

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No one seemed to have been speaking to Captain Holderness while Lois had been away. Manasseh sat quiet and silent where he did, with the book open upon his knee, his eyes thoughtfully fixed on vacancy, as if he saw a vision, or dreamed dreams. Faith stood by the table, lazily directing Nattee in her preparations; and Prudence lolled against the door-frame, between kitchen and keeping-room, playing tricks on the old Indian woman as she passed backwards and forwards, till Nattee appeared to be in a strong state of expressed irritation, which she tried in vain to repress, as whenever she showed any sign of it, Prudence only seemed excited to greater mischief. When all was ready, Manasseh lifted his right hand, and "asked a blessing," as it was termed; but the grace became a long prayer for abstract spiritual blessings, for strength to combat Satan, and to quench his fiery darts, and at length assumed, so Lois thought, a purely personal character, as if the young man had forgotten the occasion, and even the people present, but was searching into the nature of the diseases that beset his own sick soul, and spreading them out before the Lord. He was brought back by a pluck at the coat from Prudence; he opened his shut eyes, cast an angry glance at the child, who made a face at him for sole reply, and then he sat down, and they all fell to.

Grace Hickson would have thought her hospitality sadly at fault, if she had allowed Captain Holdernessee to go out in search of a bed. Skins were spread for him on the floor of the keeping-room ; a Bible, and a square bottle of spirits were placed on the table, to supply his wants during the night ; and in spite of all the cares and troubles, temptations, or sins of the members of that household, they were all asleep before the town clock struck ten.

In the morning, the captain's first care was to go out in search of the boy Elias, and the missing letter. He met him bringing it with an easy conscience, for, thought Elias, a few hours sooner or later will make no difference ; to-night or the morrow morning will be all the same. But he was startled into a sense of wrong-doing by a sound box on the ear, from the very man who had charged him to deliver it speedily, and whom he believed to be at that very moment in Boston city.

The letter delivered, all possible proof being given that Lois had a right to claim a home from her nearest relations, Captain Holdernessee thought it best to take leave.

"Thou'lt take to them, lass, maybe, when there is no one here to make thee think on the old country. Nay, nay ! parting is hard work at all times, and best get hard work done out of hand. Keep up thine

heart, my wench, and I'll come back and see thee next spring, if we are all spared till then ; and who knows what fine young miller mayn't come with me ? Don't go and get wed to a praying Puritan, meanwhile. There, there—I'm off ! God bless thee !”

And Lois was left alone in New England.

CHAPTER II.

It was hard up-hill work for Lois to win herself a place in this family. Her aunt was a woman of narrow, strong affections. Her love for her husband, if ever she had any, was burnt out and dead long ago. What she did for him she did from duty ; but duty was not strong enough to restrain that little member the tongue ; and Lois's heart often bled at the continual flow of contemptuous reproof which Grace constantly addressed to her husband, even while she was sparing no pains or trouble to minister to his bodily ease and comfort. It was more as a relief to herself that she spoke in this way, than with any desire that her speeches should affect him ; and he was too deadened by illness to feel hurt by them ; or, it may be, the constant repetition of her sarcasms had made him indifferent ; at any rate, so that he had his

food and his state of bodily warmth attended to, he very seldom seemed to care much for anything else. Even his first flow of affection towards Lois was soon exhausted; he cared for her because she arranged his pillows well and skilfully, and because she could prepare new and dainty kinds of food for his sick appetite, but no longer for her as his dead sister's child. Still he did care for her, and Lois was too glad of this little hoard of affection to examine how or why it was given. To him she could give pleasure, but apparently to no one else in that household. Her aunt looked askance at her for many reasons: the first coming of Lois to Salem was inopportune, the expression of disapprobation on her face on that evening still lingered and rankled in Grace's memory; early prejudices, and feelings, and prepossessions of the English girl were all on the side of what would now be called Church and State, what was then esteemed in that country a superstitious observance of the directions of a Popish rubric, and a servile regard for the family of an oppressing and irreligious king. Nor is it to be supposed that Lois did not feel, and feel acutely, the want of sympathy that all those with whom she was now living manifested towards the old hereditary loyalty (religious as well as political loyalty) in which she had been brought up. With her

aunt and Manasseh it was more than want of sympathy ; it was positive, active antipathy to all the ideas Lois held most dear. The very allusion, however incidentally made, to the little old grey church at Barford, where her father had preached so long,—the occasional reference to the troubles in which her own country had been distracted when she left,—and the adherence, in which she had been brought up, to the notion that the king could do no wrong, seemed to irritate Manasseh past endurance. He would get up from his reading, his constant employment when at home, and walk angrily about the room after Lois had said anything of this kind, muttering to himself ; and once he had even stopped before her, and in a passionate tone bade her not talk so like a fool. Now this was very different to his mother's sarcastic, contemptuous way of treating all poor Lois's little loyal speeches. Grace would lead her on—at least she did at first, till experience made Lois wiser—to express her thoughts on such subjects, till, just when the girl's heart was opening, her aunt would turn round upon her with some bitter sneer that roused all the evil feelings in Lois's disposition by its sting. Now Manasseh seemed, through all his anger, to be so really grieved by what he considered her error, that he went much nearer to convincing her that there might be two sides to a

question. Only this was a view, that it appeared like treachery to her dead father's memory to entertain.

Somehow, Lois felt instinctively that Manasseh was really friendly towards her. He was little in the house ; there was farming, and some kind of mercantile business to be transacted by him, as real head of the house ; and as the season drew on, he went shooting and hunting in the surrounding forests, with a daring which caused his mother to warn and reprove him in private, although to the neighbours she boasted largely of her son's courage and disregard of danger. Lois did not often walk out for the mere sake of walking, there was generally some household errand to be transacted when any of the women of the family went abroad ; but once or twice she had caught glimpses of the dreary, dark wood, hemming in the cleared land on all sides, —the great wood with its perpetual movement of branch and bough, and its solemn wail, that came into the very streets of Salem when certain winds blew, bearing the sound of the pine-trees clear upon the ears that had leisure to listen. And from all accounts, this old forest, girdling round the settlement, was full of dreaded and mysterious beasts, and still more to be dreaded Indians, stealing in and out among the shadows, intent on bloody schemes against the Christian people ; panther-streaked, shaven Indians, in

league by their own confession, as well as by the popular belief, with evil powers.

Nattee, the old Indian servant, would occasionally make Lois's blood run cold as she and Faith and Prudence listened to the wild stories she told them of the wizards of her race. It was often in the kitchen, in the darkening evening, while some cooking process was going on, that the old Indian crone, sitting on her haunches by the bright red wood embers which sent up no flame, but a lurid light reversing the shadows of all the faces around, told her weird stories while they were awaiting the rising of the dough, perchance, out of which the household bread had to be made. There ran through these stories always a ghastly, unexpressed suggestion of some human sacrifice being needed to complete the success of any incantation to the Evil One; and the poor old creature, herself believing and shuddering as she narrated her tale in broken English, took a strange, unconscious pleasure in her power over her hearers—young girls of the oppressing race, which had brought her down into a state little differing from slavery, and reduced her people to outcasts on the hunting-grounds which had belonged to her fathers.

After such tales, it required no small effort on Lois's part to go out, at her aunt's command, into the

common pasture round the town, and bring the cattle home at night. Who knew but what the double-headed snake might start up from each blackberry-bush—that wicked, cunning, accursed creature in the service of the Indian wizards, that had such power over all those white maidens who met the eyes placed at either end of his long, sinuous, creeping body, so that loathe him, loathe the Indian race as they would, off they must go into the forest to seek out some Indian man, and must beg to be taken into his wigwam, abjuring faith and race for ever? Or there were spells—so Nattee said—hidden about the ground by the wizards, which changed that person's nature who found them; so that, gentle and loving as they might have been before, thereafter they took no pleasure but in the cruel torments of others, and had a strange power given to them of causing such torments at their will. Once Nattee, speaking low to Lois, who was alone with her in the kitchen, whispered out her terrified belief that such a spell had Prudence found; and when the Indian showed her arms to Lois, all pinched black and blue by the impish child, the English girl began to be afraid of her cousin as of one possessed. But it was not Nattee alone, nor young imaginative girls alone, that believed in these stories. We can afford to smile at them now; but our

English ancestors entertained superstitions of much the same character at the same period, and with less excuse, as the circumstances surrounding them were better known, and consequently more explicable by common sense than the real mysteries of the deep, untrodden forests of New England. The gravest divines not only believed stories similar to that of the double-headed serpent, and other tales of witchcraft, but they made such narrations the subjects of preaching and prayer; and as cowardice makes us all cruel, men who were blameless in many of the relations of life, and even praiseworthy in some, became, from superstition, cruel persecutors about this time, showing no mercy towards any one whom they believed to be in league with the Evil One.

Faith was the person with whom the English girl was the most intimately associated in her uncle's house. The two were about the same age, and certain household employments were shared between them. They took it in turns to call in the cows, to make up the butter which had been churned by Hosea, a stiff old out-door servant, in whom Grace Hickson placed great confidence; and each lassie had her great spinning-wheel for wool, and her lesser for flax, before a month had elapsed after Lois's coming. Faith was a grave, silent person, never merry, sometimes

very sad, though Lois was a long time in even guessing why. She would try in her sweet, simple fashion to cheer her cousin up, when the latter was depressed, by telling her old stories of English ways and life. Occasionally, Faith seemed to care to listen, occasionally she did not heed one word, but dreamed on. Whether of the past or of the future, who could tell?

Stern old ministers came in to pay their pastoral visits. On such occasions, Grace Hickson would put on clean apron and clean cap, and make them more welcome than she was ever seen to do any one else, bringing out the best provisions of her store, and setting of all before them. Also, the great Bible was brought forth, and Hosea and Nattee summoned from their work to listen while the minister read a chapter, and, as he read, expounded it at considerable length. After this all knelt, while he, standing, lifted up his right hand, and prayed for all possible combinations of Christian men, for all possible cases of spiritual need ; and lastly, taking the individuals before him, he would put up a very personal supplication for each, according to his notion of their wants. At first Lois wondered at the aptitude of one or two of his prayers of this description to the outward circumstances of each case ; but when she perceived that her aunt had usually a pretty long confidential conversation with the minister

in the early part of his visit, she became aware that he received both his impressions and his knowledge through the medium of "that godly woman, Grace Hickson;" and I am afraid she paid less regard to the prayer "for the maiden from another land, who hath brought the errors of that land as a seed with her, even across the great ocean, and who is letting even now the little seeds shoot up into an evil tree, in which all unclean creatures may find shelter."

"I like the prayers of our Church better," said Lois, one day to Faith. "No clergyman in England can pray his own words, and therefore it is that he cannot judge of others so as to fit his prayers to what he esteems to be their case, as Mr. Tappau did this morning."

"I hate Mr. Tappau!" said Faith, shortly, a passionate flash of light coming out of her dark, heavy eyes.

"Why so, cousin? It seems to me as if he were a good man, although I like not his prayers."

Faith only repeated her words, "I hate him."

Lois was sorry for this strong bad feeling; instinctively sorry, for she was loving herself, delighted in being loved, and felt a jar run through her at every sign of want of love in others. But she did not know what to say, and was silent at the time. Faith, too,

went on turning her wheel with vehemence, but spoke never a word until her thread snapped, and then she pushed the wheel away hastily and left the room.

Then Prudence crept softly up to Lois's side. This strange child seemed to be tossed about by varying moods: to-day she was caressing and communicative, to-morrow she might be deceitful, mocking, and so indifferent to the pain or sorrows of others that you could call her almost inhuman.

"So thou dost not like Pastor Tappau's prayers?" she whispered.

Lois was sorry to have been overheard, but she neither would nor could take back her words.

"I like them not so well as the prayers I used to hear at home."

"Mother says thy home was with the ungodly. Nay, don't look at me so—it was not I that said it. I'm none so fond of praying myself, nor of Pastor Tappau for that matter. But Faith cannot abide him, and I know why. Shall I tell thee, cousin Lois?"

"No! Faith did not tell me, and she was the right person to give her own reasons."

"Ask her where young Mr. Nolan is gone to, and thou wilt hear. I have seen Faith cry by the hour together about Mr. Nolan."

"Hush, child, hush!" said Lois, for she heard

Faith's approaching step, and feared lest she should overhear what they were saying.

The truth was that, a year or two before, there had been a great struggle in Salem village, a great division in the religious body, and Pastor Tappau had been the leader of the more violent, and, ultimately, the successful party. In consequence of this, the less popular minister, Mr. Nolan, had had to leave the place. And him Faith Hickson loved with all the strength of her passionate heart, although he never was aware of the attachment he had excited, and her own family were too regardless of manifestations of mere feeling to ever observe the signs of any emotion on her part. But the old Indian servant Nattee saw and observed them all. She knew, as well as if she had been told the reason, why Faith had lost all care about father or mother, brother and sister, about household work and daily occupation, nay, about the observances of religion as well. Nattee read the meaning of the deep smouldering of Faith's dislike to Pastor Tappau aright; the Indian woman understood why the girl (whom alone of all the white people she loved) avoided the old minister, —would hide in the wood-stack sooner than be called in to listen to his exhortations and prayers. With savage, untutored people, it is not "Love me, love my dog," they are often jealous of the creature beloved;

but it is, "Whom thou hatest I will hate;" and Nattee's feeling towards Pastor Tappau was even an exaggeration of the mute, unspoken hatred of Faith.

For a long time, the cause of her cousin's dislike and avoidance of the minister was a mystery to Lois; but the name of Nolan remained in her memory whether she would or no, and it was more from girlish interest in a suspected love affair, than from any indifferent and heartless curiosity, that she could not help piecing together little speeches and actions, with Faith's interest in the absent banished minister, for an explanatory clue, till not a doubt remained in her mind. And this without any further communication with Prudence, for Lois declined hearing any more on the subject from her, and so gave deep offence.

Faith grew sadder and duller as the autumn drew on. She lost her appetite, her brown complexion became sallow and colourless, her dark eyes looked hollow and wild. The first of November was near at hand. Lois, in her instinctive, well-intentioned efforts to bring some life and cheerfulness into the monotonous household, had been telling Faith of many English customs, silly enough, no doubt, and which scarcely lighted up a flicker of interest in the American girl's mind. The cousins were lying awake in their bed in the great unplastered room, which was in part store-room, in

part bedroom. Lois was full of sympathy for Faith that night. For long she had listened to her cousin's heavy, irrepressible sighs, in silence. Faith sighed because her grief was of too old a date for violent emotion or crying. Lois listened without speaking in the dark, quiet night hours, for a long, long time. She kept quite still, because she thought such vent for sorrow might relieve her cousin's weary heart. But when at length, instead of lying motionless, Faith seemed to be growing restless even to convulsive motions of her limbs, Lois began to speak, to talk about England, and the dear old ways at home, without exciting much attention on Faith's part, until at length she fell upon the subject of Hallow-e'en, and told about customs then and long afterwards practised in England, and that have scarcely yet died out in Scotland. As she told of tricks she had often played, of the apple eaten facing a mirror, of the dripping sheet, of the basins of water, of the nuts burning side by side, and many other such innocent ways of divination, by which laughing, trembling English maidens sought to see the form of their future husbands, if husbands they were to have, then Faith listened breathlessly, asking short, eager questions, as if some ray of hope had entered into her gloomy heart. Lois went on speaking, telling her of all the stories that would

confirm the truth of the second sight vouchsafed to all seekers in the accustomed methods, half believing, half incredulous herself, but desiring, above all things, to cheer up poor Faith.

Suddenly, Prudence rose up from her truckle-bed in the dim corner of the room. They had not thought that she was awake, but she had been listening long.

"Cousin Lois may go out and meet Satan by the brook-side if she will, but if thou goest, Faith, I will tell mother—ay, and I will tell Pastor Tappau, too. Hold thy stories, Cousin Lois, I am afeard of my very life. I would rather never be wed at all, than feel the touch of the creature that would take the apple out of my hand, as I held it over my left shoulder." The excited girl gave a loud scream of terror at the image her fancy had conjured up. Faith and Lois sprang out towards her, flying across the moonlit room in their white nightgowns. At the same instant, summoned by the same cry, Grace Hickson came to her child.

"Hush! hush!" said Faith, authoritatively.

"What is it, my wench?" asked Grace. While Lois, feeling as if she had done all the mischief, kept silence.

"Take her away, take her away!" screamed Prudence. "Look over her shoulder—her left shoulder—

the Evil One is there now, I see him stretching over for the half-bitten apple."

"What is this she says?" said Grace, austere.

"She is dreaming," said Faith; "Prudence, hold thy tongue." And she pinched the child severely, while Lois more tenderly tried to soothe the alarms she felt that she had conjured up.

"Be quiet, Prudence," said she, "and go to sleep. I will stay by thee till thou hast gone off into slumber."

"No, no! go away," sobbed Prudence, who was really terrified at first, but was now assuming more alarm than she felt, from the pleasure she received at perceiving herself the centre of attention. "Faith shall stay by me, not you, wicked English witch!"

So Faith sat by her sister; and Grace, displeased and perplexed, withdrew to her own bed, purposing to inquire more into the matter in the morning. Lois only hoped it might all be forgotten by that time, and resolved never to talk again of such things. But an event happened in the remaining hours of the night to change the current of affairs. While Grace had been absent from her room, her husband had had another paralytic stroke: whether he, too, had been alarmed by that eldritch scream no one could ever know. By the faint light of the rush candle burning at the bed-

side, his wife perceived that a great change had taken place in his aspect on her return: the irregular breathing came almost like snorts—the end was drawing near. The family were roused, and all help given that either the doctor or experience could suggest. But before the late November morning light, all was ended for Ralph Hickson.

The whole of the ensuing day, they sat or moved in darkened rooms, and spoke few words, and those below their breath. Manasseh kept at home, regretting his father, no doubt, but showing little emotion. Faith was the child that bewailed her loss most grievously; she had a warm heart, hidden away somewhere under her moody exterior, and her father had shown her far more passive kindness than ever her mother had done, for Grace made distinct favourites of Manasseh, her only son, and Prudence, her youngest child. Lois was about as unhappy as any of them, for she had felt strongly drawn towards her uncle as her kindest friend, and the sense of his loss renewed the old sorrow she had experienced at her own parents' death. But she had no time and no place to cry in. On her devolved many of the cares, which it would have seemed indecorous in the nearer relatives to interest themselves in enough to take an active part: the change required in their dress, the household preparations for the sad

feast of the funeral—Lois had to arrange all under her aunt's stern direction.

But a day or two afterwards—the last day before the funeral—she went into the yard to fetch in some fagots for the oven ; it was a solemn, beautiful, starlit evening, and some sudden sense of desolation in the midst of the vast universe thus revealed touched Lois's heart, and she sat down behind the woodstack, and cried very plentiful tears.

She was startled by Manasseh, who suddenly turned the corner of the stack, and stood before her.

“Lois crying !”

“Only a little,” she said, rising up, and gathering her bundle of fagots, for she dreaded being questioned by her grim, impassive cousin. To her surprise, he laid his hand on her arm, and said :

“Stop one minute. Why art thou crying, cousin ?”


“I don't know,” she said, just like a child questioned in like manner ; and she was again on the point of weeping.

“My father was very kind to thee, Lois ; I do not wonder that thou grievest after him. But the Lord who taketh away can restore tenfold. I will be as kind as my father—yea, kinder. This is not a time to talk of marriage and giving in marriage. But after we have buried our dead, I wish to speak to thee.”

Lois did not cry now, but she shrank with affright. What did her cousin mean? She would far rather that he had been angry with her for unreasonable grieving, for folly.

She avoided him carefully—as carefully as she could, without seeming to dread him—for the next few days. Sometimes she thought it must have been a bad dream; for if there had been no English lover in the case, no other man in the whole world, she could never have thought of Manasseh as her husband; indeed, till now, there had been nothing in his words or actions to suggest such an idea. Now it had been suggested, there was no telling how much she loathed him. He might be good, and pious—he doubtless was—but his dark fixed eyes, moving so slowly and heavily, his lank black hair, his grey coarse skin, all made her dislike him now—all his personal ugliness and ungainliness struck on her senses with a jar, since those few words spoken behind the haystack.

She knew that sooner or later the time must come for further discussion of this subject; but, like a coward, she tried to put it off, by clinging to her aunt's apron-string, for she was sure that Grace Hickson had far different views for her only son. As, indeed, she had, for she was an ambitious, as well as a religious woman; and by an early purchase of land in Salem



village, the Hicksons had become wealthy people, without any great exertions of their own; partly, also, by the silent process of accumulation, for they had never cared to change their manner of living from the time when it had been suitable to a far smaller income than that which they at present enjoyed. So much for worldly circumstances. As for their worldly character, it stood as high. No one could say a word against any of their habits or actions. The righteousness and godliness were patent to every one's eyes. So Grace Hickson thought herself entitled to pick and choose among the maidens, before she should meet with one fitted to be Manasseh's wife. None in Salem came up to her imaginary standard. She had it in her mind even at this very time—so soon after her husband's death—to go to Boston, and take counsel with the leading ministers there, with worthy Mr. Cotton Mather at their head, and see if they could tell her of a well-favoured and godly young maiden in their congregations worthy of being the wife of her son. But, besides good looks and godliness, the wench must have good birth, and good wealth, or Grace Hickson would have put her contemptuously on one side. When once this paragon was found, and the ministers had approved, Grace anticipated no difficulty on her son's part. So Lois was right in feeling that her aunt

would dislike any speech of marriage between Manasseh and herself.

But the girl was brought to bay one day in this wise. Manasseh had ridden forth on some business, which every one said would occupy him the whole day ; but, meeting the man with whom he had to transact his affairs, he returned earlier than any one expected. He missed Lois from the keeping-room where his sisters were spinning, almost immediately. His mother sat by at her knitting—he could see Nattee in the kitchen through the open door. He was too reserved to ask where Lois was, but he quietly sought till he found her—in the great loft, already piled with winter stores of fruit and vegetables. Her aunt had sent her there to examine the apples one by one, and pick out such as were unsound, for immediate use. She was stooping down, and intent upon this work, and was hardly aware of his approach, until she lifted up her head and saw him standing close before her. She dropped the apple she was holding, went a little paler than her wont, and faced him in silence.

“Lois,” he said, “thou rememberest the words that I spoke while we yet mourned over my father. I think that I am called to marriage now, as the head of this household. And I have seen no maiden so pleasant in my sight as thou art, Lois!” He tried to take her

hand. But she put it behind her with a childish shake of her head, and, half-crying, said :

“ Please, Cousin Manasseh, do not say this to me. I dare say you ought to be married, being the head of the household now ; but I don’t want to be married. I would rather not.”

“ That is well spoken,” replied he, frowning a little, nevertheless. “ I should not like to take to wife an over-forward maiden, ready to jump at wedlock. Besides, the congregation might talk, if we were to be married too soon after my father’s death. We have, perchance, said enough, even now. But I wished thee to have thy mind set at ease as to thy future well-doing. Thou wilt have leisure to think of it, and to bring thy mind more fully round to it.” Again he held out his hand. This time she took hold of it with a free, frank gesture.

“ I owe you somewhat for your kindness to me ever since I came, Cousin Manasseh ; and I have no way of paying you but by telling you truly I can love you as a dear friend, if you will let me, but never as a wife.”

He flung her hand away, but did not take his eyes off her face, though his glance was lowering and gloomy. He muttered something which she did not quite hear, and so she went on bravely although she

kept trembling a little, and had much ado to keep from crying.

“Please let me tell you all. There was a young man in Barford—nay, Manasseh, I cannot speak if you are so angry ; it is hard work to tell you any how—he said that he wanted to marry me ; but I was poor, and his father would have none of it, and I do not want to marry any one ; but if I did, it would be——.” Her voice dropped, and her blushes told the rest. Manasseh stood looking at her with sullen, hollow eyes, that had a gathering touch of wildness in them, and then he said :

“It is borne in upon me—verily I see it as in a vision—that thou must be my spouse, and no other man’s. Thou canst not escape what is foredoomed. Months ago, when I set myself to read the old godly books in which my soul used to delight until thy coming, I saw no letters of printers’ ink marked on the page, but I saw a gold and ruddy type of some unknown language, the meaning whereof was whispered into my soul ; it was, ‘Marry Lois ! marry Lois !’ And when my father died, I knew it was the beginning of the end. It is the Lord’s will, Lois, and thou canst not escape from it.” And again he would have taken her hand and drawn her towards him. But this time she eluded him with ready movement.

"I do not acknowledge it to be the Lord's will, Manasseh," said she. "It is not 'borne in upon me,' as you Puritans call it, that I am to be your wife. I am none so set upon wedlock as to take you, even though there be no other chance for me. For I do not care for you as I ought to care for my husband. But I could have cared for you very much as a cousin—as a kind cousin."

She stopped speaking; she could not choose the right words with which to speak to him of her gratitude and friendliness, which yet could never be any feeling nearer and dearer, no more than two parallel lines can ever meet.

But he was so convinced, by what he considered the spirit of prophecy, that Lois was to be his wife, that he felt rather more indignant at what he considered to be her resistance to the preordained decree, than really anxious as to the result. Again he tried to convince her that neither he nor she had any choice in the matter, by saying :

"The voice said unto me 'Marry Lois,' and I said, 'I will, Lord.'"

"But," Lois replied, "the voice, as you call it, has never spoken such a word to me."

"Lois," he answered, solemnly, "it will speak. And then wilt thou obey, even as Samuel did?"

"No ; indeed I cannot !" she answered, briskly. "I may take a dream to be truth, and hear my own fancies, if I think about them too long. But I cannot marry any one from obedience."

"Lois, Lois, thou art as yet unregenerate ; but I have seen thee in a vision as one of the elect, robed in white. As yet thy faith is too weak for thee to obey meekly, but it shall not always be so. I will pray that thou mayest see thy preordained course. Meanwhile, I will smooth away all worldly obstacles."

"Cousin Manasseh ! Cousin Manasseh !" cried Lois after him, as he was leaving the room, "come back. I cannot put it in strong enough words. Manasseh, there is no power in heaven or earth that can make me love thee enough to marry thee, or to wed thee without such love. And this I say solemnly, because it is better that this should end at once."

For a moment he was staggered ; then he lifted up his hands, and said,

"God forgive thee thy blasphemy ! Remember Hazael, who said, 'Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ?' and went straight and did it, because his evil courses were fixed and appointed for him from before the foundation of the world. And shall not thy paths be laid out among the godly as it hath been foretold to me ?"

He went away ; and for a minute or two Lois felt as if his words must come true, and that, struggle as she would, hate her doom as she would, she must become his wife ; and, under the circumstances, many a girl would have succumbed to her apparent fate. Isolated from all previous connections, hearing no word from England, living in the heavy, monotonous routine of a family with one man for head, and this man esteemed a hero by most of those around him, simply because he was the only man in the family,—these facts alone would have formed strong presumptions that most girls would have yielded to the offers of such a one. But, besides this, there was much to tell upon the imagination in those days, in that place, and time. It was prevalently believed that there were manifestations of spiritual influence—of the direct influence both of good and bad spirits—constantly to be perceived in the course of men's lives. Lots were drawn, as guidance from the Lord ; the Bible was opened, and the leaves allowed to fall apart, and the first text the eye fell upon was supposed to be appointed from above as a direction. Sounds were heard that could not be accounted for ; they were made by the evil spirits not yet banished from the desert places of which they had so long held possession. Sights, inexplicable and mysterious, were

dimly seen—Satan, in some shape, seeking whom he might devour. And at the beginning of the long winter season, such whispered tales, such old temptations and hauntings, and devilish terrors, were supposed to be peculiarly rife. Salem was, as it were, snowed up, and left to prey upon itself. The long, dark evenings, the dimly-lighted rooms, the creaking passages, where heterogeneous articles were piled away out of reach of the keen-piercing frost, and where occasionally, in the dead of night, a sound was heard, as of some heavy falling body, when, next morning, everything appeared to be in its right place—so accustomed are we to measure noises by comparison with themselves, and not with the absolute stillness of the night-season—the white mist, coming nearer and nearer to the windows every evening in strange shapes, like phantoms,—all these, and many other circumstances, such as the distant fall of mighty trees in the mysterious forests girdling them round, the faint whoop and cry of some Indian seeking his camp, and unwittingly nearer to the white men's settlement than either he or they would have liked could they have chosen, the hungry yells of the wild beasts approaching the cattle-pens,—these were the things which made that winter life in Salem, in the memorable time of 1691-2, seem strange, and haunted, and terrific to many :

peculiarly weird and awful to the English girl in her first year's sojourn in America.

And now imagine Lois worked upon perpetually by Manasseh's conviction that it was decreed that she should be his wife, and you will see that she was not without courage and spirit to resist as she did, steadily, firmly, and yet sweetly. Take one instance out of many, when her nerves were subjected to a shock, slight in relation it is true, but then remember that she had been all day, and for many days, shut up within doors, in a dull light, that at mid-day was almost dark with a long-continued snow-storm. Evening was coming on, and the wood fire was more cheerful than any of the human beings surrounding it; the monotonous whirr of the smaller spinning-wheels had been going on all day, and the store of flax down stairs was nearly exhausted, when Grace Hickson bade Lois fetch down some more from the store-room, before the light so entirely waned away that it could not be found without a candle, and a candle it would be dangerous to carry into that apartment full of combustible materials, especially at this time of hard frost, when every drop of water was locked up and bound in icy hardness. So Lois went, half-shrinking from the long passage that led to the stairs leading up into the store-room, for it was in this passage that the strange night

sounds were heard, which every one had begun to notice, and speak about in lowered tones. She sang, however, as she went, "to keep her courage up"—sang, however, in a subdued voice, the evening hymn she had so often sung in Barford church—

' Glory to Thee, my God, this night—'

and so it was, I suppose, that she never heard the breathing or motion of any creature near her till, just as she was loading herself with flax to carry down, she heard some one—it was Manasseh—say close to her ear :

"Has the voice spoken yet? Speak, Lois! Has the voice spoken yet to thee—that speaketh to me day and night, 'Marry Lois?'"

She started and turned a little sick, but spoke almost directly in a brave, clear manner :

"No! Cousin Manasseh. And it never will."

"Then I must wait yet longer," he replied, hoarsely, as if to himself. "But all submission—all submission."

At last a break came upon the monotony of the long, dark winter. The parishioners once more raised the discussion whether—the parish extending as it did—it was not absolutely necessary for Pastor Tappan to have help. This question had been mooted once

before ; and then Pastor Tappau had acquiesced in the necessity, and all had gone on smoothly for some months after the appointment of his assistant, until a feeling had sprung up on the part of the elder minister, which might have been called jealousy of the younger, if so godly a man as Pastor Tappau could have been supposed to entertain so evil a passion. However that might be, two parties were speedily formed, the younger and more ardent being in favour of Mr. Nolan, the elder and more persistent—and, at the time, the more numerous—clinging to the old grey-headed, dogmatic Mr. Tappau, who had married them, baptized their children, and was to them literally as a “pillar of the church.” So Mr. Nolan left Salem, carrying away with him, possibly, more hearts than that of Faith Hickson’s ; but certainly she had never been the same creature since.

But now—Christmas, 1691—one or two of the older members of the congregation being dead, and some who were younger men having come to settle in Salem—Mr. Tappau being also older, and, some charitably supposed, wiser—a fresh effort had been made, and Mr. Nolan was returning to labour in ground apparently smoothed over. Lois had taken a keen interest in all the proceedings for Faith’s sake,—far more than the latter did for herself, any spectator would have

said. Faith's wheel never went faster or slower, her thread never broke, her colour never came, her eyes were never uplifted with sudden interest, all the time these discussions respecting Mr. Nolan's return were going on. But Lois, after the hint given by Prudence, had found a clue to many a sigh and look of despairing sorrow, even without the help of Nattee's improvised songs, in which, under strange allegories, the helpless love of her favourite was told to ears heedless of all meaning, except those of the tender-hearted and sympathetic Lois. Occasionally, she heard a strange chant of the old Indian woman's—half in her own language, half in broken English—droned over some simmering pipkin, from which the smell was, to say the least, unearthly. Once, on perceiving this odour in the keeping-room, Grace Hickson suddenly exclaimed—

“Nattee is at her heathen ways again; we shall have some mischief unless she is stayed.”

But Faith, moving quicker than ordinary, said something about putting a stop to it, and so forestalled her mother's evident intention of going into the kitchen. Faith shut the door between the two rooms, and entered upon some remonstrance with Nattee; but no one could hear the words used. Faith and Nattee seemed more bound together by love and common interest, than any other two among the self-contained individuals

comprising this household. Lois sometimes felt as if her presence as a third interrupted some confidential talk between her cousin and the old servant. And yet she was fond of Faith, and could almost think that Faith liked her more than she did either mother, brother, or sister ; for the first two were indifferent as to any unspoken feelings, while Prudence delighted in discovering them only to make an amusement to herself out of them.

One day Lois was sitting by herself at her sewing table, while Faith and Nattee were holding one of the secret conclaves from which Lois felt herself to be tacitly excluded, when the outer door opened, and a tall, pale young man, in the strict professional habit of a minister, entered. Lois sprang up with a smile and a look of welcome for Faith's sake, for this must be the Mr. Nolan whose name had been on the tongue of every one for days, and who was, as Lois knew, expected to arrive the day before.

He seemed half surprised at the glad alacrity with which he was received by this stranger : possibly he had not heard of the English girl, who was an inmate in the house where formerly he had seen only grave, solemn, rigid, or heavy faces, and had been received with a stiff form of welcome, very different from the blushing, smiling, dimpled looks that innocently met

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him with the greeting almost of an old acquaintance. Lois having placed a chair for him, hastened out to call Faith, never doubting but that the feeling which her cousin entertained for the young pastor was mutual, although it might be unrecognised in its full depth by either.


"Faith!" said she, bright and breathless. "Guess——No," checking herself to an assumed unconsciousness of any particular importance likely to be affixed to her words, "Mr. Nolan, the new pastor, is in the keeping-room. He has asked for my aunt and Manasseh. My aunt is gone to the prayer meeting at Pastor Tappau's, and Manasseh is away." Lois went on speaking to give Faith time, for the girl had become deadly white at the intelligence, while, at the same time, her eyes met the keen, cunning eyes of the old Indian with a peculiar look of half-wondering awe, while Nattee's looks expressed triumphant satisfaction.

"Go," said Lois, smoothing Faith's hair, and kissing the white, cold cheek, "or he will wonder why no one comes to see him, and perhaps think he is not welcome." Faith went without another word into the keeping-room, and shut the door of communication. Nattee and Lois were left together. Lois felt as happy as if some piece of good fortune had befallen herself. For the time, her growing dread of Manasseh's wild,

ominous persistence in his suit, her aunt's coldness, her own loneliness, were all forgotten, and she could almost have danced with joy. Nattee laughed aloud, and talked and chuckled to herself: "Old Indian woman great mystery. Old Indian woman sent hither and thither; go where she is told, where she hears with her ears. But old Indian woman"—and here she drew herself up, and the expression of her face quite changed—"know how to call, and then white man must come; and old Indian have spoken never a word, and white man have hear nothing with his ears." So the old crone muttered.

All this time, things were going on very differently in the keeping-room to what Lois imagined. Faith sat stiller even than usual; her eyes downcast, her words few. A quick observer might have noticed a certain tremulousness about her hands, and an occasional twitching throughout all her frame. But Pastor Nolan was not a keen observer upon this occasion; he was absorbed with his own little wonders and perplexities. His wonder was that of a carnal man—who that pretty stranger might be, who had seemed, on his first coming, so glad to see him, but had vanished instantly, apparently not to reappear. And, indeed, I am not sure if his perplexity was not that of a carnal man rather than that of a godly minister, for this was his

dilemma. It was the custom of Salem (as we have already seen) for the minister, on entering a household for the visit which, among other people and in other times, would have been termed a "morning call," to put up a prayer for the eternal welfare of the family under whose roof-tree he was. Now this prayer was expected to be adapted to the individual character, joys, sorrows, wants, and failings of every member present; and here was he, a young pastor, alone with a young woman, and he thought—vain thoughts, perhaps, but still very natural—that the implied guesses at her character, involved in the minute supplications above described, would be very awkward in a tête-à-tête prayer; so, whether it was his wonder or his perplexity, I do not know, but he did not contribute much to the conversation for some time, and at last, by a sudden burst of courage and impromptu hit, he cut the Gordian knot by making the usual proposal for prayer, and adding to it a request that the household might be summoned. In came Lois, quiet and decorous; in came Nattee, all one impassive, stiff piece of wood,—no look of intelligence or trace of giggling near her countenance. Solemnly recalling each wandering thought, Pastor Nolan knelt in the midst of these three to pray. He was a good and truly religious man, whose name here is the only thing disguised, and



played his part bravely in the awful trial to which he was afterwards subjected ; and if at the time, before he went through his fiery persecutions, the human fancies which beset all young hearts came across his, we at this day know that these fancies are no sin. But now he prays in earnest, prays so heartily for himself, with such a sense of his own spiritual need and spiritual failings, that each one of his hearers feels as if a prayer and a supplication had gone up for each of them. Even Nattee muttered the few words she knew of the Lord's Prayer ; gibberish though the disjointed nouns and verbs might be, the poor creature said them because she was stirred to unwonted reverence. As for Lois, she rose up comforted and strengthened, as no special prayers of Pastor Tappau had ever made her feel. But Faith was sobbing, sobbing aloud, almost hysterically, and made no effort to rise, but lay on her outstretched arms spread out upon the settle. Lois and Pastor Nolan looked at each other for an instant. Then Lois said :

“Sir, you must go. My cousin has not been strong for some time, and doubtless she needs more quiet than she has had to-day.”

Pastor Nolan bowed, and left the house ; but in a moment he returned. Half opening the door, but without entering, he said :

"I come back to ask, if perchance I may call this evening to inquire how young Mistress Hickson finds herself?"

But Faith did not hear this ; she was sobbing louder than ever.

"Why did you send him away, Lois? I should have been better directly, and it is so long since I have seen him."

She had her face hidden as she uttered these words, and Lois could not hear them distinctly. She bent her head down by her cousin's on the settle, meaning to ask her to repeat what she had said. But in the irritation of the moment, and prompted possibly by some incipient jealousy, Faith pushed Lois away so violently that the latter was hurt against the hard, sharp corner of the wooden settle. Tears came into her eyes ; not so much because her cheek was bruised, as because of the surprised pain she felt at this repulse from the cousin towards whom she was feeling so warmly and kindly. Just for the moment, Lois was as angry as any child could have been ; but some of the words of Pastor Nolan's prayer yet rang in her ears, and she thought it would be a shame if she did not let them sink into her heart. She dared not, however, stoop again to caress Faith, but stood quietly by her, sorrowfully waiting, until a step at the outer door

caused Faith to rise quickly, and rush into the kitchen, leaving Lois to bear the brunt of the new-comer. It was Manasseh, returned from hunting. He had been two days away, in company with other young men belonging to Salem. It was almost the only occupation which could draw him out of his secluded habits. He stopped suddenly at the door on seeing Lois, and alone, for she had avoided him of late in every possible way.

“Where is my mother?”

“At a prayer meeting at Pastor Tappau’s. She has taken Prudence. Faith has left the room this minute. I will call her.” And Lois was going towards the kitchen, when he placed himself between her and the door.

“Lois,” said he, “the time is going by, and I cannot wait much longer. The visions come thick upon me, and my sight grows clearer and clearer. Only this last night, camping out in the woods, I saw in my soul, between sleeping and waking, the spirit come and offer thee two lots, and the colour of the one was white, like a bride’s, and the other was black and red, which is, being interpreted, a violent death. And when thou didst choose the latter the spirit said unto me, ‘Come!’ and I came, and did as I was bidden. I put it on thee with mine own hands, as it is preor-

dained, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice and be my wife. And when the black and red dress fell to the ground, thou wert even as a corpse three days old. Now, be advised, Lois, in time. Lois, my cousin, I have seen it in a vision, and my soul cleaveth unto thee—I would fain spare thee.”

He was really in earnest—in passionate earnest; whatever his visions, as he called them, might be, he believed in them, and this belief gave something of unselfishness to his love for Lois. This she felt at this moment, if she had never done so before, and it seemed like a contrast to the repulse she had just met with from his sister. He had drawn near her, and now he took hold of her hand, repeating in his wild, pathetic, dreamy way:

“And the voice said unto me, ‘Marry Lois!’” And Lois was more inclined to soothe and reason with him than she had ever been before, since the first time of his speaking to her on the subject,—when Grace Hickson and Prudence entered the room from the passage. They had returned from the prayer meeting by the back way, which had prevented the sound of their approach from being heard.

But Manasseh did not stir or look round; he kept his eyes fixed on Lois, as if to note the effect of his words. Grace came hastily forwards, and lifting up

her strong right arm, smote their joined hands in twain, in spite of the fervour of Manasseh's grasp.

"What means this?" said she, addressing herself more to Lois than to her son, anger flashing out of her deep-set eyes.

Lois waited for Manasseh to speak. He seemed, but a few minutes before, to be more gentle and less threatening than he had been of late on this subject, and she did not wish to irritate him. But he did not speak, and her aunt stood angrily waiting for an answer.

"At any rate," thought Lois, "it will put an end to the thought in his mind when my aunt speaks out about it."

"My cousin seeks me in marriage," said Lois.

"Thee!" and Grace struck out in the direction of her niece with a gesture of supreme contempt. But now Manasseh spoke forth:

"Yea! it is preordained. The voice has said it, and the spirit has brought her to me as my bride."

"Spirit! an evil spirit then. A good spirit would have chosen out for thee a godly maiden of thine own people, and not a prelatist and a stranger like this girl. A pretty return, Mistress Lois, for all our kindness."

"Indeed, Aunt Hickson, I have done all I could—

Cousin Manasseh knows it—to show him I can be none of his. I have told him,” said she, blushing, but determined to say the whole out at once, “that I am all but troth-plight to a young man of our own village at home; and, even putting all that on one side, I wish not for marriage at present.”

“Wish rather for conversion and regeneration. Marriage is an unseemly word in the mouth of a maiden. As for Manasseh, I will take reason with him in private; and, meanwhile, if thou hast spoken truly, throw not thyself in his path, as I have noticed thou hast done but too often of late.”

Lois’s heart burnt within her at this unjust accusation, for she knew how much she had dreaded and avoided her cousin, and she almost looked to him to give evidence that her aunt’s last words were not true. But, instead, he recurred to his one fixed idea, and said :

“Mother, listen! If I wed not Lois, both she and I die within the year. I care not for life; before this, as you know, I have sought for death” (Grace shuddered, and was for a moment subdued by some recollection of past horror); “but if Lois were my wife I should live, and she would be spared from what is the other lot. That whole vision grows clearer to me day by day. Yet, when I try to know whether I am one of the elect, all is dark. The mystery of Free-Will

and Fore-Knowledge is a mystery of Satan's devising, not of God's."

"Alas, my son! Satan is abroad among the brethren even now; but let the old vexed topics rest. Sooner than fret thyself again, thou shalt have Lois to be thy wife, though my heart was set far differently for thee."

"No, Manasseh," said Lois. "I love you well as a cousin, but wife of yours I can never be. Aunt Hickson, it is not well to delude him so. I say, if ever I marry man, I am troth-plight to one in England."

"Tush, child! I am your guardian in my dead husband's place. Thou thinkest thyself so great a prize that I would clutch at thee whether or no, I doubt not. I value thee not, save as a medicine for Manasseh, if his mind get disturbed again, as I have noted signs of late."

This, then, was the secret explanation of much that had alarmed her in her cousin's manner: and if Lois had been a physician of modern times, she might have traced somewhat of the same temperament in his sisters as well—in Prudence's lack of natural feeling and impish delight in mischief, in Faith's vehemence of unrequited love. But as yet Lois did not know, any more than Faith, that the attachment of the latter to Mr. Nolan was not merely unreturned, but even unperceived, by the young minister.

He came, it is true,—came often to the house, sat long with the family, and watched them narrowly, but took no especial notice of Faith. Lois perceived this, and grieved over it; Nattee perceived it, and was indignant at it, long before Faith slowly acknowledged it to herself, and went to Nattee the Indian woman, rather than to Lois her cousin, for sympathy and counsel.

“He cares not for me,” said Faith. “He cares more for Lois’s little finger than for my whole body,” the girl moaned out in the bitter pain of jealousy.

“Hush thee, hush thee, prairie bird! How can he build a nest, when the old bird has got all the moss and the feathers? Wait till the Indian has found means to send the old bird flying far away.” This was the mysterious comfort Nattee gave.

Grace Hickson took some kind of charge over Manasseh that relieved Lois of much of her distress at his strange behaviour. Yet at times he escaped from his mother’s watchfulness, and in such opportunities he would always seek Lois, entreating her, as of old, to marry him—sometimes pleading his love for her, oftener speaking wildly of his visions and the voices which he heard foretelling a terrible futurity.

We have now to do with events which were taking

place in Salem, beyond the narrow circle of the Hickson family ; but as they only concern us in as far as they bore down in their consequences on the future of those who formed part of it, I shall go over the narrative very briefly. The town of Salem had lost by death, within a very short time preceding the commencement of my story, nearly all its venerable men and leading citizens—men of ripe wisdom and sound counsel. The people had hardly yet recovered from the shock of their loss, as one by one the patriarchs of the primitive little community had rapidly followed each other to the grave. They had been beloved as fathers, and looked up to as judges in the land. The first bad effect of their loss was seen in the heated dissension which sprang up between Pastor Tappau and the candidate Nolan. It had been apparently healed over ; but Mr. Nolan had not been many weeks in Salem, after his second coming, before the strife broke out afresh, and alienated many for life who had till then been bound together by the ties of friendship or relationship. Even in the Hickson family something of this feeling soon sprang up ; Grace being a vehement partisan of the elder pastor's more gloomy doctrines, while Faith was a passionate, if a powerless, advocate of Mr. Nolan. Manasseh's growing absorption in his own fancies, and imagined

gift of prophecy, making him comparatively indifferent to all outward events, did not tend to either the fulfilment of his visions, or the elucidation of the dark mysterious doctrines over which he had pondered too long for the health either of his mind or body; while Prudence delighted in irritating every one by her advocacy of the views of thinking to which they were most opposed, and retailing every gossiping story to the person most likely to disbelieve, and be indignant at what she told, with an assumed unconsciousness of any such effect to be produced. There was much talk of the congregational difficulties and dissensions being carried up to the general court, and each party naturally hoped that, if such were the course of events, the opposing pastor and that portion of the congregation which adhered to him might be worsted in the struggle.

Such was the state of things in the township when, one day towards the end of the month of February, Grace Hickson returned from the weekly prayer meeting, which it was her custom to attend at Pastor Tappau's house, in a state of extreme excitement. On her entrance into her own house she sat down, rocking her body backwards and forwards, and praying to herself: both Faith and Lois stopped their spinning, in wonder at her agitation, before either of

them ventured to address her. At length Faith rose, and spoke :

“ Mother, what is it? Hath anything happened of an evil nature?”

The brave, stern, old woman’s face was blanched, and her eyes were almost set in horror, as she prayed ; the great drops running down her cheeks.

It seemed almost as if she had to make a struggle to recover her sense of the present homely accustomed life, before she could find words to answer :

“ Evil nature ! Daughters, Satan is abroad,—is close to us. I have this very hour seen him afflict two innocent children, as of old he troubled those who were possessed by him in Judea. Hester and Abigail Tappau have been contorted and convulsed by him and his servants into such shapes as I am afeard to think on; and when their father, godly Mr. Tappau, began to exhort and to pray, their howlings were like the wild beasts’ of the field. Satan is of a truth let loose amongst us. The girls kept calling upon him as if he were even then present among us. Abigail screeched out that he stood at my very back in the guise of a black man ; and truly, as I turned round at her words, I saw a creature like a shadow vanishing, and turned all of a cold sweat. Who knows where he is now? Faith, lay straws across on the door-sill.”

"But if he be already entered in," asked Prudence, "may not that make it difficult for him to depart?"

Her mother, taking no notice of her question, went on rocking herself, and praying, till again she broke out into narration :

"Reverend Mr. Tappau says, that only last night he heard a sound as of a heavy body dragged all through the house by some strong power ; once it was thrown against his bedroom door, and would, doubtless, have broken it in, if he had not prayed fervently and aloud at that very time ; and a shriek went up at his prayer that made his hair stand on end ; and this morning all the crockery in the house was found broken and piled up in the middle of the kitchen floor ; and Pastor Tappau says, that as soon as he began to ask a blessing on the morning's meal, Abigail and Hester cried out, as if some one was pinching them. Lord, have mercy upon us all ! Satan is of a truth let loose."

"They sound like the old stories I used to hear in Barford," said Lois, breathless with affright.

Faith seemed less alarmed ; but then her dislike to Pastor Tappau was so great, that she could hardly sympathise with any misfortunes that befel him or his family.

Towards evening Mr. Nolan came in. In general,

so high did party spirit run, Grace Hickson only tolerated his visits, finding herself often engaged at such hours, and being too much abstracted in thought to show him the ready hospitality which was one of her most prominent virtues. But to-day, both as bringing the latest intelligence of the new horrors sprung up in Salem, and as being one of the Church militant (or what the Puritans considered as equivalent to the Church militant) against Satan, he was welcomed by her in an unusual manner.

He seemed oppressed with the occurrences of the day: at first it appeared to be almost a relief to him to sit still, and cogitate upon them, and his hosts were becoming almost impatient for him to say something more than mere monosyllables, when he began:

“Such a day as this, I pray that I may never see again. It is as if the devils whom our Lord banished into the herd of swine, had been permitted to come again upon the earth. And I would it were only the lost spirits who were tormenting us; but I much fear, that certain of those whom we have esteemed as God’s people have sold their souls to Satan, for the sake of a little of his evil power, whereby they may afflict others for a time. Elder Sherringham hath lost this very day a good and valuable horse, wherewith he used to drive his family to meeting, his wife being bedridden.”

"Perchance," said Lois, "the horse died of some natural disease."

"True," said Pastor Nolan ; "but I was going on to say, that as he entered into his house, full of dolour at the loss of his beast, a mouse ran in before him so sudden that it almost tripped him up, though an instant before there was no such thing to be seen ; and he caught at it with his shoe and hit it, and it cried out like a human creature in pain, and straight ran up the chimney, caring nothing for the hot flame and smoke."

Manasseh listened greedily to all this story, and when it was ended he smote upon his breast, and prayed aloud for deliverance from the power of the Evil One ; and he continually went on praying at intervals through the evening, with every mark of abject terror on his face and in his manner—he, the bravest, most daring hunter in all the settlement. Indeed, all the family huddled together in silent fear, scarcely finding any interest in the usual household occupations. Faith and Lois sat with arms entwined, as in days before the former had become jealous of the latter ; Prudence asked low, fearful questions of her mother and of the pastor as to the creatures that were abroad, and the ways in which they afflicted others ; and when Grace besought the minister to pray for her and her household, he made a long and passionate supplication that

none of that little flock might ever so far fall away into hopeless perdition as to be guilty of the sin without forgiveness—the Sin of Witchcraft.

CHAPTER III.

“THE sin of witchcraft.” We read about it, we look on it from the outside ; but we can hardly realize the terror it induced. Every impulsive or unaccustomed action, every little nervous affection, every ache or pain was noticed, not merely by those around the sufferer, but by the person himself, whoever he might be, that was acting, or being acted upon, in any but the most simple and ordinary manner. He or she (for it was most frequently a woman or girl that was the supposed subject) felt a desire for some unusual kind of food—some unusual motion or rest—her hand twitched, her foot was asleep, or her leg had the cramp ; and the dreadful question immediately suggested itself, “ Is any one possessing an evil power over me, by the help of Satan ? ” and perhaps they went on to think, “ It is bad enough to feel that my body can be made to suffer through the power of some unknown evil-wisher to me, but what if Satan gives them still further power, and they can touch my soul,

and inspire me with loathful thoughts leading me into crimes which at present I abhor?" and so on, till the very dread of what might happen, and the constant dwelling of the thoughts, even with horror, upon certain possibilities, or what were esteemed such, really brought about the corruption of imagination at least, which at first they had shuddered at. Moreover, there was a sort of uncertainty as to who might be infected—not unlike the overpowering dread of the plague, which made some shrink from their best-beloved with irrepressible fear. The brother or sister, who was the dearest friend of their childhood and youth, might now be bound in some mysterious deadly pact with evil spirits of the most horrible kind—who could tell? And in such a case it became a duty, a sacred duty, to give up the earthly body which had been once so loved, but which was now the habitation of a soul corrupt and horrible in its evil inclinations. Possibly, terror of death might bring on confession, and repentance, and purification. Or if it did not, why away with the evil creature, the witch, out of the world, down to the kingdom of the master, whose bidding was done on earth in all manner of corruption and torture of God's creatures! There were others who, to these more simple, if more ignorant, feelings of horror at witches and witchcraft, added the desire,

conscious or unconscious, of revenge on those whose conduct had been in any way displeasing to them. Where evidence takes a supernatural character, there is no disproving it. This argument comes up : " You have only the natural powers ; I have supernatural. You admit the existence of the supernatural by the condemnation of this very crime of witchcraft. You hardly know the limits of the natural powers ; how then can you define the supernatural ? I say that in the dead of night, when my body seemed to all present to be lying in quiet sleep, I was, in the most complete and wakeful consciousness, present in my body at an assembly of witches and wizards with Satan at their head ; that I was by them tortured in my body, because my soul would not acknowledge him as its king ; and that I witnessed such and such deeds. What the nature of the appearance was that took the semblance of myself, sleeping quietly in my bed, I know not ; but admitting, as you do, the possibility of witchcraft, you cannot disprove my evidence." This evidence might be given truly or falsely, as the person witnessing believed it or not ; but every one must see what immense and terrible power was abroad for revenge. Then, again, the accused themselves ministered to the horrible panic abroad. Some, in dread of death, confessed from cowardice to the imaginary crimes of

which they were accused, and of which they were promised a pardon on confession. Some, weak and terrified, came honestly to believe in their own guilt, through the diseases of imagination which were sure to be engendered at such a time as this.

Lois sat spinning with Faith. Both were silent, pondering over the stories that were abroad. Lois spoke first.

“Oh, Faith! this country is worse than ever England was, even in the days of Master Matthew Hopkinson, the witch-finder. I grow frightened of every one, I think. I even get afeard sometimes of Nattee !”

Faith coloured a little. Then she asked,

“Why? What should make you distrust the Indian woman?”

“Oh! I am ashamed of my fear as soon as it arises in my mind. But, you know, her look and colour were strange to me when first I came; and she is not a christened woman; and they tell stories of Indian wizards; and I know not what the mixtures are which she is sometimes stirring over the fire, nor the meaning of the strange chants she sings to herself. And once I met her in the dusk, just close by Pastor Tappau’s house, in company with Hota, his servant—it was just before we heard of the sore disturbance in

his house—and I have wondered if she had aught to do with it.”

Faith sat very still, as if thinking. At last she said :

“If Nattee has powers beyond what you and I have, she will not use them for evil; at least not evil to those whom she loves.”

“That comforts me but little,” said Lois. “If she has powers beyond what she ought to have, I dread her, though I have done her no evil; nay, though I could almost say she bore me a kindly feeling. But such powers are only given by the Evil One; and the proof thereof is, that, as you imply, Nattee would use them on those who offend her.”

“And why should she not?” asked Faith, lifting her eyes, and flashing heavy fire out of them at the question.

“Because,” said Lois, not seeing Faith’s glance, “we are told to pray for them that despitefully use us, and to do good to them that persecute us. But poor Nattee is not a christened woman. I would that Mr. Nolan would baptize her; it would, maybe, take her out of the power of Satan’s temptations.”

“Are you never tempted?” asked Faith, half scornfully; “and yet I doubt not you were well baptized!”

"True," said Lois, sadly; "I often do very wrong, but, perhaps, I might have done worse, if the holy form had not been observed."

They were again silent for a time.

"Lois," said Faith, "I did not mean any offence. But do you never feel as if you would give up all that future life, of which the parsons talk, and which seems so vague and so distant, for a few years of real, vivid blessedness to begin to-morrow—this hour, this minute? Oh! I could think of happiness for which I would willingly give up all those misty chances of heaven——"

"Faith, Faith!" cried Lois, in terror, holding her hand before her cousin's mouth, and looking around in fright. "Hush! you know not who may be listening; you are putting yourself in his power."

But Faith pushed her hand away, and said, "Lois, I believe in him no more than I believe in heaven. Both may exist, but they are so far away that I defy them. Why, all this ado about Mr. Tappau's house—promise me never to tell living creature, and I will tell you a secret."

"No!" said Lois, terrified. "I dread all secrets. I will hear none. I will do all that I can for you, cousin Faith, in any way; but just at this time, I strive to keep my life and thoughts within the strictest

bounds of godly simplicity, and I dread pledging myself to aught that is hidden and secret."

"As you will, cowardly girl, full of terrors, which, if you had listened to me, might have been lessened, if not entirely done away with." And Faith would not utter another word, though Lois tried meekly to entice her into conversation on some other subject.

The rumour of witchcraft was like the echo of thunder among the hills. It had broken out in Mr. Tappau's house, and his two little daughters were the first supposed to be bewitched; but round about, from every quarter of the town, came in accounts of sufferers by witchcraft. There was hardly a family without one of these supposed victims. Then arose a growl and menaces of vengeance from many a household—menaces deepened, not daunted by the terror and mystery of the suffering that gave rise to them.

At length a day was appointed when, after solemn fasting and prayer, Mr. Tappau invited the neighbouring ministers and all godly people to assemble at his house, and unite with him in devoting a day to solemn religious services, and to supplication for the deliverance of his children, and those similarly afflicted, from the power of the Evil One. All Salem poured out towards the house of the minister. There was a look of excitement on all their faces; eagerness and horror

were depicted on many, while stern resolution, amounting to determined cruelty, if the occasion arose, was seen on others.

In the midst of the prayer, Hester Tappau, the younger girl, fell into convulsions ; fit after fit came on, and her screams mingled with the shrieks and cries of the assembled congregation. In the first pause, when the child was partially recovered, when the people stood around exhausted and breathless, her father, the Pastor Tappau, lifted his right hand, and adjured her, in the name of the Trinity, to say who tormented her. There was a dead silence ; not a creature stirred of all those hundreds. Hester turned wearily and uneasily, and moaned out the name of Hota, her father's Indian servant. Hota was present, apparently as much interested as any one ; indeed, she had been busying herself much in bringing remedies to the suffering child. But now she stood aghast, transfixed, while her name was caught up and shouted out in tones of reprobation and hatred by all the crowd around her. Another moment and they would have fallen upon the trembling creature and torn her limb from limb—pale, dusky, shivering Hota, half guilty-looking from her very bewilderment. But Pastor Tappau, that gaunt, grey man, lifting himself to his utmost height, signed to them to go back, to

keep still while he addressed them ; and then he told them, that instant vengeance was not just, deliberate punishment ; that there would be need of conviction, perchance of confession—he hoped for some redress for his suffering children from her revelations, if she were brought to confession. They must leave the culprit in his hands, and in those of his brother ministers, that they might wrestle with Satan before delivering her up to the civil power. He spoke well, for he spoke from the heart of a father seeing his children exposed to dreadful and mysterious suffering, and firmly believing that he now held the clue in his hand which should ultimately release them and their fellow-sufferers. And the congregation moaned themselves into unsatisfied submission, and listened to his long, passionate prayer, which he uplifted even while the hapless Hota stood there, guarded and bound by two men, who glared at her like bloodhounds ready to slip, even while the prayer ended in the words of the merciful Saviour.

Lois sickened and shuddered at the whole scene ; and this was no intellectual shuddering at the folly and superstition of the people, but tender moral shuddering at the sight of guilt which she believed in, and at the evidence of men's hatred and abhorrence, which, when shown even to the guilty, troubled and distressed her merciful heart. She

followed her aunt and cousins out into the open air, with downcast eyes and pale face. Grace Hickson was going home with a feeling of triumphant relief at the detection of the guilty one. Faith alone seemed uneasy and disturbed beyond her wont, for Manasseh received the whole transaction as the fulfilment of a prophecy, and Prudence was excited by the novel scene into a state of discordant high spirits.

"I am quite as old as Hester Tappau," said she ;
"her birthday is in September and mine in October."

"What has that to do with it?" said Faith, sharply.

"Nothing, only she seemed such a little thing for all those grave ministers to be praying for, and so many folk come from a distance—some from Boston they said—all for her sake, as it were. Why, didst thou see, it was godly Mr. Henwick that held her head when she wriggled so, and old Madam Holbrook had herself helped upon a chair to see the better. I wonder how long I might wriggle, before great and godly folk would take so much notice of me? But, I suppose, that comes of being a pastor's daughter. She'll be so set up there'll be no speaking to her now. Faith! thinkest thou that Hota really had bewitched her? She gave me corn-cakes, the last time I was at Pastor Tappau's, just like any other woman, only, per-

chance, a trifle more good-natured ; and to think of her being a witch after all !”

But Faith seemed in a hurry to reach home, and paid no attention to Prudence’s talking. Lois hastened on with Faith, for Manasseh was walking alongside of his mother, and she kept steady to her plan of avoiding him, even though she pressed her company upon Faith, who had seemed of late desirous of avoiding her.

That evening the news spread through Salem, that Hota had confessed her sin—had acknowledged that she was a witch. Nattee was the first to hear the intelligence. She broke into the room where the girls were sitting with Grace Hickson, solemnly doing nothing, because of the great prayer-meeting in the morning, and cried out, “Mercy, mercy, mistress, everybody ! take care of poor Indian Nattee, who never do wrong, but for mistress and the family ! Hota one bad wicked witch, she say so herself ; oh, me ! oh, me !” and stooping over Faith, she said something in a low, miserable tone of voice, of which Lois only heard the word “torture.” But Faith heard all, and turning very pale, half accompanied, half led Nattee back to her kitchen.

Presently, Grace Hickson came in. She had been out to see a neighbour ; it will not do to say that so

godly a woman had been gossiping; and, indeed, the subject of the conversation she had held was of too serious and momentous a nature for me to employ a light word to designate it. There was all the listening to and repeating of small details and rumours, in which the speakers have no concern, that constitutes gossiping; but in this instance, all trivial facts and speeches might be considered to bear such dreadful significance, and might have so ghastly an ending, that such whispers were occasionally raised to a tragic importance. Every fragment of intelligence that related to Mr. Tappau's household was eagerly snatched at; how his dog howled all one long night through, and could not be stilled; how his cow suddenly failed in her milk only two months after she had calved; how his memory had forsaken him one morning, for a minute or two, in repeating the Lord's Prayer, and he had even omitted a clause thereof in his sudden perturbation; and how all these forerunners of his children's strange illness might now be interpreted and understood—this had formed the staple of the conversation between Grace Hickson and her friends. There had arisen a dispute among them at last, as to how far these subjections to the power of the Evil One were to be considered as a judgment upon Pastor Tappau for some sin on his part; and if

so, what? It was not an unpleasant discussion, although there was considerable difference of opinion; for as none of the speakers had had their families so troubled, it was rather a proof that they had none of them committed any sin. In the midst of this talk, one, entering in from the street, brought the news that Hota had confessed all—had owned to signing a certain little red book which Satan had presented to her—had been present at impious sacraments—had ridden through the air to Newbury Falls—and, in fact, had assented to all the questions which the elders and magistrates, carefully reading over the confessions of the witches who had formerly been tried in England, in order that they might not omit a single inquiry, had asked of her. More she had owned to, but things of inferior importance, and partaking more of the nature of earthly tricks than of spiritual power. She had spoken of carefully adjusted strings, by which all the crockery in Pastor Tappan's house could be pulled down or disturbed; but of such intelligible malpractices the gossips of Salem took little heed. One of them said that such an action showed Satan's prompting, but they all preferred to listen to the grander guilt of the blasphemous sacraments and supernatural rides. The narrator ended with saying that Hota was to be hung the next morning, in spite of her confession, even although her life had been promised to her if she ac-

knowledge her sin; for it was well to make an example of the first-discovered witch, and it was also well that she was an Indian, a heathen, whose life would be no great loss to the community. Grace Hickson on this spoke out. It was well that witches should perish off the face of the earth, Indian or English, heathen or, worse, a baptized Christian who had betrayed the Lord, even as Judas did, and had gone over to Satan. For her part, she wished that the first-discovered witch had been a member of a godly English household, that it might be seen of all men that religious folk were willing to cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, if tainted with this devilish sin. She spoke sternly and well. The last comer said, that her words might be brought to the proof, for it had been whispered that Hota had named others, and some from the most religious families of Salem, whom she had seen among the unholy communicants at the sacrament of the Evil One. And Grace replied that she would answer for it, all godly folk would stand the proof, and quench all natural affection rather than that such a sin should grow and spread among them. She herself had a weak bodily dread of witnessing the violent death even of an animal; but she would not let that deter her from standing amidst those who cast the accursed creature out from among them on the morrow morning.

Contrary to her wont, Grace Hickson told her family much of this conversation. It was a sign of her excitement on the subject that she thus spoke, and the excitement spread in different forms through her family. Faith was flushed and restless, wandering between the keeping-room and the kitchen, and questioning her mother particularly as to the more extraordinary parts of Hota's confession, as if she wished to satisfy herself that the Indian witch had really done those horrible and mysterious deeds.

Lois shivered and trembled with affright at the narration, and the idea that such things were possible. Occasionally she found herself wandering off into sympathetic thought for the woman who was to die, abhorred of all men, and unpardoned by God, to whom she had been so fearful a traitor, and who was now, at this very time—when Lois sat among her kindred by the warm and cheerful firelight, anticipating many peaceful, perchance happy, morrows—solitary, shivering, panic-stricken, guilty, with none to stand by her and exhort her, shut up in darkness between the cold walls of the town prison. But Lois almost shrank from sympathising with so loathsome an accomplice of Satan, and prayed for forgiveness for her charitable thought; and yet, again, she remembered the tender spirit of the Saviour, and allowed

herself to fall into pity, till at last her sense of right and wrong became so bewildered that she could only leave all to God's disposal, and just ask that He would take all creatures and all events into His hands.

Prudence was as bright as if she were listening to some merry story—curious as to more than her mother would tell her—seeming to have no particular terror of witches or witchcraft, and yet to be especially desirous to accompany her mother the next morning to the hanging. Lois shrank from the cruel, eager face of the young girl as she begged her mother to allow her to go. Even Grace was disturbed and perplexed by her daughter's pertinacity.

"No!" said she. "Ask me no more. Thou shalt not go. Such sights are not for the young. I go, and I sicken at the thoughts of it. But I go to show that I, a Christian woman, take God's part against the devil's. Thou shalt not go, I tell thee. I could whip thee for thinking of it."

"Manasseh says Hota was well whipped by Pastor Tappau ere she was brought to confession," said Prudence, as if anxious to change the subject of discussion.

Manasseh lifted up his head from the great folio Bible, brought by his father from England, which he was studying. He had not heard what Prudence

said, but he looked up at the sound of his name. All present were startled at his wild eyes, his bloodless face. But he was evidently annoyed at the expression of their countenances.

"Why look ye at me in that manner?" asked he. And his manner was anxious and agitated. His mother made haste to speak:

"It was but that Prudence said something that thou hast told her—that Pastor Tappau defiled his hands by whipping the witch Hota. What evil thought has got hold of thee? Talk to us, and crack not thy skull against the learning of man."

"It is not the learning of man that I study: it is the word of God. I would fain know more of the nature of this sin of witchcraft, and whether it be, indeed, the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. At times I feel a creeping influence coming over me, prompting all evil thoughts and unheard-of deeds, and I question within myself, 'Is not this the power of witchcraft?' and I sicken, and loathe all that I do or say, and yet some evil creature hath the mastery over me, and I must needs do and say what I loathe and dread. Why wonder you, mother, that I, of all men, strive to learn the exact nature of witchcraft, and for that end study the word of God? Have you not seen me when I was, as it were, possessed with a devil?"

He spoke calmly, sadly, but as under deep conviction. His mother rose to comfort him.

"My son," she said, "no one ever saw thee do deeds, or heard thee utter words, which any one could say were prompted by devils. We have seen thee, poor lad, with thy wits gone astray for a time, but all thy thoughts sought rather God's will in forbidden places, than lost the clue to them for one moment in hankering after the powers of darkness. Those days are long past; a future lies before thee. Think not of witches or of being subject to the power of witchcraft. I did evil to speak of it before thee. Let Lois come and sit by thee, and talk to thee."

Lois went to her cousin, grieved at heart for his depressed state of mind, anxious to soothe and comfort him, and yet recoiling more than ever from the idea of ultimately becoming his wife—an idea to which she saw her aunt reconciling herself unconsciously day by day, as she perceived the English girl's power of soothing and comforting her cousin, even by the very tones of her sweet cooing voice.

He took Lois's hand.

"Let me hold it. It does me good," said he. "Ah, Lois, when I am by you I forget all my troubles—will the day never come when you will listen to the voice that speaks to me continually?"

"I never hear it, Cousin Manasseh," she said, softly ;
"but do not think of the voices. Tell me of the land
you hope to enclose from the forest—what manner of
trees grow on it?"

Thus, by simple questions on practical affairs, she
led him back, in her unconscious wisdom, to the subjects
on which he had always shown strong practical sense.
He talked on these with all due discretion till the hour
for family prayer came round, which was early in those
days. It was Manasseh's place to conduct it, as head
of the family ; a post which his mother had always
been anxious to assign to him since her husband's
death. He prayed extempore ; and to-night his sup-
plications wandered off into wild, unconnected frag-
ments of prayer, which all those kneeling around
began, each according to her anxiety for the speaker,
to think would never end. Minutes elapsed, and grew
to quarters of an hour, and his words only became
more emphatic and wilder, praying for himself alone,
and laying bare the recesses of his heart. At length
his mother rose, and took Lois by the hand, for she
had faith in Lois's power over her son, as being akin
to that which the shepherd David, playing on his
harp, had over king Saul sitting on his throne. She
drew her towards him, where he knelt facing into the
circle, with his eyes upturned, and the tranced agony

of his face depicting the struggle of the troubled soul within.

"Here is Lois," said Grace, almost tenderly; "she would fain go to her chamber." (Down the girl's face the tears were streaming.) "Rise, and finish thy prayer in thy closet."

But at Lois's approach he sprang to his feet,—sprang aside.

"Take her away, mother! Lead me not into temptation. She brings me evil and sinful thoughts. She overshadows me, even in the presence of my God. She is no angel of light, or she would not do this. She troubles me with the sound of a voice bidding me marry her, even when I am at my prayers. Avaunt! Take her away!"

He would have struck at Lois if she had not shrunk back, dismayed and affrighted. His mother, although equally dismayed, was not affrighted. She had seen him thus before; and understood the management of his paroxysm.

"Go, Lois! the sight of thee irritates him, as once that of Faith did. Leave him to me."

And Lois rushed away to her room, and threw herself on her bed, like a panting, hunted creature. Faith came after her slowly and heavily.

"Lois," said she, "wilt thou do me a favour? It

is not much to ask. Wilt thou arise before daylight, and bear this letter from me to Pastor Nolan's lodgings? I would have done it myself, but mother has bidden me to come to her, and I may be detained until the time when Hota is to be hung; and the letter tells of matters pertaining to life and death. Seek out Pastor Nolan wherever he may be, and have speech of him after he has read the letter."

"Cannot Nattee take it?" asked Lois.

"No!" Faith answered, fiercely. "Why should she?"

But Lois did not reply. A quick suspicion darted through Faith's mind, sudden as lightning. It had never entered there before.

"Speak, Lois. I read thy thoughts. Thou wouldst fain not be the bearer of this letter?"

"I will take it," said Lois, meekly. "It concerns life and death, you say?"

"Yes!" said Faith, in quite a different tone of voice. But, after a pause of thought, she added: "Then, as soon as the house is still, I will write what I have to say, and leave it here, on this chest; and thou wilt promise me to take it before the day is fully up, while there is yet time for action."

"Yes! I promise," said Lois. And Faith knew enough of her to feel sure that the deed would be done, however reluctantly.

The letter was written—laid on the chest ; and, ere day dawned, Lois was astir, Faith watching her from between her half-closed eyelids—eyelids that had never been fully closed in sleep the livelong night. The instant Lois, cloaked and hooded, left the room, Faith sprang up, and prepared to go to her mother, whom she heard already stirring. Nearly every one in Salem was awake and up on this awful morning, though few were out of doors, as Lois passed along the streets. Here was the hastily erected gallows, the black shadow of which fell across the street with ghastly significance ; now she had to pass the iron-barred gaol, through the unglazed windows of which she heard the fearful cry of a woman, and the sound of many footsteps. On she sped, sick almost to faintness, to the widow woman's where Mr. Nolan lodged. He was already up and abroad, gone, his hostess believed, to the gaol. Thither Lois, repeating the words “for life and for death !” was forced to go. Retracing her steps, she was thankful to see him come out of those dismal portals, rendered more dismal for being in heavy shadow, just as she approached. What his errand had been she knew not ; but he looked grave and sad, as she put Faith's letter into his hands, and stood before him quietly waiting until he should read it, and deliver the expected answer. But, instead of opening it, he held it in his hand, apparently absorbed

in thought. At last he spoke aloud, but more to himself than to her :

“My God! and is she then to die in this fearful delirium? It must be—can be—only delirium, that prompts such wild and horrible confessions. Mistress Barclay, I come from the presence of the Indian woman appointed to die. It seems, she considered herself betrayed last evening by her sentence not being respited, even after she had made confession of sin enough to bring down fire from heaven ; and, it seems to me, the passionate, impotent anger of this helpless creature has turned to madness, for she appals me by the additional revelations she has made to the keepers during the night—to me this morning. I could almost fancy that she thinks, by deepening the guilt she confesses, to escape this last dread punishment of all, as if, were a tithe of what she says true, one could suffer such a sinner to live. Yet to send her to death in such a state of mad terror! What is to be done?”

“Yet Scripture says that we are not to suffer witches in the land,” said Lois, slowly.

“True; I would but ask for a respite till the prayers of God’s people had gone up for His mercy. Some would pray for her, poor wretch as she is. You would, Mistress Barclay, I am sure?” But he said it in a questioning tone.

“I have been praying for her in the night many a

time," said Lois, in a low voice. "I pray for her in my heart at this moment; I suppose, they are bidden to put her out of the land, but I would not have her entirely God-forsaken. But, sir, you have not read my cousin's letter. And she bade me bring back an answer with much urgency."

Still he delayed. He was thinking of the dreadful confession he came from hearing. If it were true, the beautiful earth was a polluted place, and he almost wished to die, to escape from such pollution, into the white innocence of those who stood in the presence of God.

Suddenly his eyes fell on Lois's pure, grave face, upturned and watching his. Faith in earthly goodness came over his soul in that instant, "and he blessed her unaware."

He put his hand on her shoulder, with an action half paternal—although the difference in their ages was not above a dozen years—and, bending a little towards her, whispered, half to himself, "Mistress Barclay, you have done me good."

"I!" said Lois, half affrighted—"I done you good! How?"

"By being what you are. But, perhaps, I should rather thank God, who sent you at the very moment when my soul was so disquieted."

At this instant, they were aware of Faith standing

in front of them, with a countenance of thunder. Her angry look made Lois feel guilty. She had not enough urged the pastor to read his letter, she thought; and it was indignation at this delay in what she had been commissioned to do with the urgency of life or death, that made her cousin lower at her so from beneath her straight black brows. Lois explained how she had not found Mr. Nolan at his lodgings, and had had to follow him to the door of the gaol. But Faith replied, with obdurate contempt :

“Spare thy breath, cousin Lois. It is easy seeing on what pleasant matters thou and the Pastor Nolan were talking. I marvel not at thy forgetfulness. My mind is changed. Give me back my letter, sir; it was about a poor matter—an old woman’s life. And what is that compared to a young girl’s love?”

Lois heard but for an instant; did not understand that her cousin, in her jealous anger, could suspect the existence of such a feeling as love between her and Mr. Nolan. No imagination as to its possibility had ever entered her mind; she had respected him, almost revered him—nay, had liked him as the probable husband of Faith. At the thought that her cousin could believe her guilty of such treachery, her grave eyes dilated, and fixed themselves on the flaming countenance of Faith. That serious, unprotesting

manner of perfect innocence must have told on her accuser, had it not been that, at the same instant, the latter caught sight of the crimsoned and disturbed countenance of the pastor, who felt the veil rent off the unconscious secret of his heart. Faith snatched her letter out of his hands, and said :

“Let the witch hang! What care I? She has done harm enough with her charms and her sorcery on Pastor Tappau’s girls. Let her die, and let all other witches look to themselves; for there be many kinds of witchcraft abroad. Cousin Lois, thou wilt like best to stop with Pastor Nolan, or I would pray thee to come back with me to breakfast.”

Lois was not to be daunted by jealous sarcasm. She held out her hand to Pastor Nolan, determined to take no heed of her cousin’s mad words, but to bid him farewell in her accustomed manner. He hesitated before taking it, and when he did, it was with a convulsive squeeze that almost made her start. Faith waited and watched all, with set lips and vengeful eyes. She bade no farewell; she spake no word; but grasping Lois tightly by the back of the arm, she almost drove her before her down the street till they reached their home.

The arrangement for the morning was this: Grace Hickson and her son Manasseh were to be present at

the hanging of the first witch executed in Salem, as pious and godly heads of a family. All the other members were strictly forbidden to stir out, until such time as the low-tolling bell announced that all was over in this world for Hota, the Indian witch. When the execution was ended, there was to be a solemn prayer-meeting of all the inhabitants of Salem ; ministers had come from a distance to aid by the efficacy of their prayers in these efforts to purge the land of the devil and his servants. There was reason to think that the great old meeting-house would be crowded, and when Faith and Lois reached home, Grace Hickson was giving her directions to Prudence, urging her to be ready for an early start to that place. The stern old woman was troubled in her mind at the anticipation of the sight she was to see, before many minutes were over, and spoke in a more hurried and incoherent manner than was her wont. She was dressed in her Sunday best ; but her face was very grey and colourless, and she seemed afraid to cease speaking about household affairs, for fear she should have time to think. Manasseh stood by her, perfectly, rigidly still ; he also was in his Sunday clothes. His face, too, was paler than its wont, but it wore a kind of absent, rapt expression, almost like that of a man who sees a vision. As Faith entered, still holding Lois in her fierce grasp,

Manasseh started and smiled ; but still dreamily. His manner was so peculiar, that even his mother stayed her talking to observe him more closely ; he was in that state of excitement which usually ended in what his mother and certain of her friends esteemed a prophetic revelation. He began to speak, at first very low, and then his voice increased in power :

“How beautiful is the land of Beulah, far over the sea, beyond the mountains ! Thither the angels carry her, lying back in their arms like one fainting. They shall kiss away the black circle of death, and lay her down at the feet of the Lamb. I hear her pleading there for those on earth who consented to her death. O Lois ! pray also for me, pray for me, miserable !”

When he uttered his cousin’s name all their eyes turned towards her. It was to her that his vision related ! She stood among them, amazed, awe-stricken, but not like one affrighted or dismayed. She was the first to speak :

“Dear friends, do not think of me ; his words may or may not be true. I am in God’s hands all the same, whether he have the gift of prophecy or not. Besides, hear you not that I end where all would fain end ? Think of him, and of his needs. Such times as these always leave him exhausted and weary, when he comes out of them.”

And she busied herself in cares for his refreshment, aiding her aunt's trembling hands to set before him the requisite food, as he now sat tired and bewildered, gathering together with difficulty his scattered senses.

Prudence did all she could to assist and speed their departure. But Faith stood apart, watching in silence with her passionate, angry eyes.

As soon as they had set out on their solemn, fatal errand, Faith left the room. She had not tasted food or touched drink. Indeed, they all felt sick at heart. The moment her sister had gone up stairs, Prudence sprang to the settle on which Lois had thrown down her cloak and hood :

"Lend me your muffles and mantle, Cousin Lois. I never yet saw a woman hanged, and I see not why I should not go. I will stand on the edge of the crowd ; no one will know me, and I will be home long before my mother."

"No !" said Lois, "that may not be. My aunt would be sore displeased. I wonder at you, Prudence, seeking to witness such a sight." And as she spoke she held fast her cloak, which Prudence vehemently struggled for.

Faith returned, brought back possibly by the sound of the struggle. She smiled—a deadly smile.

"Give it up, Prudence. Strive no more with her.

She has bought success in this world, and we are but her slaves."

"Oh, Faith!" said Lois, relinquishing her hold of the cloak, and turning round with passionate reproach in her look and voice, "what have I done that you should speak so of me; you, that I have loved as I think one loves a sister?"

Prudence did not lose her opportunity, but hastily arrayed herself in the mantle, which was too large for her, and which she had, therefore, considered as well adapted for concealment; but, as she went towards the door, her feet became entangled in the unusual length, and she fell, bruising her arm pretty sharply.

"Take care, another time, how you meddle with a witch's things," said Faith, as one scarcely believing her own words, but at enmity with all the world in her bitter jealousy of heart. Prudence rubbed her arm and looked stealthily at Lois.

"Witch Lois! Witch Lois!" said she at last, softly, pulling a childish face of spite at her.

"Oh, hush, Prudence! Do not bandy such terrible words. Let me look at thine arm. I am sorry for thy hurt, only glad that it has kept thee from disobeying thy mother."

"Away, away!" said Prudence, springing from her. "I am afeard of her in very truth, Faith. Keep

between me and the witch, or I will throw a stool at her."

Faith smiled—it was a bad and wicked smile—but she did not stir to calm the fears she had called up in her young sister. Just at this moment, the bell began to toll. Hota, the Indian witch, was dead. Lois covered her face with her hands. Even Faith went a deadlier pale than she had been, and said, sighing, "Poor Hota! But death is best."


Prudence alone seemed unmoved by any thoughts connected with the solemn, monotonous sound. Her only consideration was, that now she might go out into the street and see the sights, and hear the news, and escape from the terror which she felt at the presence of her cousin. She flew up stairs to find her own mantle, ran down again, and past Lois, before the English girl had finished her prayer, and was speedily mingled among the crowd going to the meeting-house. There also Faith and Lois came in due course of time, but separately, not together. Faith so evidently avoided Lois, that she, humbled and grieved, could not force her company upon her cousin, but loitered a little behind,—the quiet tears stealing down her face, shed for the many causes that had occurred this morning.

The meeting-house was full to suffocation; and, as

it sometimes happens on such occasions, the greatest crowd was close about the doors, from the fact that few saw, on their first entrance, where there might be possible spaces into which they could wedge themselves. Yet they were impatient of any arrivals from the outside, and pushed and hustled Faith, and after her Lois, till the two were forced on to a conspicuous place in the very centre of the building, where there was no chance of a seat, but still space to stand in. Several stood around, the pulpit being in the middle, and already occupied by two ministers in Geneva bands and gowns, while other ministers, similarly attired, stood holding on to it, almost as if they were giving support instead of receiving it. Grace Hickson and her son sat decorously in their own pew, thereby showing that they had arrived early from the execution. You might almost have traced out the number of those who had been at the hanging of the Indian witch, by the expression of their countenances. They were awe-stricken into terrible repose ; while the crowd pouring in, still pouring in, of those who had not attended the execution, looked all restless, and excited, and fierce. A buzz went round the meeting, that the stranger minister who stood along with Pastor Tappau in the pulpit was no other than Dr. Cotton Mather himself, come all the way from Boston to assist in purging Salem of witches.

And now Pastor Tappau began his prayer, extempore, as was the custom. His words were wild and incoherent, as might be expected from a man who had just been consenting to the bloody death of one who was, but a few days ago, a member of his own family; violent and passionate, as was to be looked for in the father of children, whom he believed to suffer so fearfully from the crime he would denounce before the Lord. He sat down at length from pure exhaustion. Then Dr. Cotton Mather stood forward: he did not utter more than a few words of prayer, calm in comparison with what had gone before, and then he went on to address the great crowd before him in a quiet, argumentative way, but arranging what he had to say with something of the same kind of skill which Antony used in his speech to the Romans after Cæsar's murder. Some of Dr. Mather's words have been preserved to us, as he afterwards wrote them down in one of his works. Speaking of those "unbelieving Sadducees" who doubted the existence of such a crime, he said: "Instead of their apish shouts and jeers at blessed Scripture, and histories which have such undoubted confirmation as that no man that has breeding enough to regard the common laws of human society will offer to doubt of them, it becomes us rather to adore the goodness of God, who from the mouths of babes and

sucklings has ordained truth, and by the means of the sore-afflicted children of your godly pastor, has revealed the fact that the devils have with most horrid operations broken in upon your neighbourhood. Let us beseech Him that their power may be restrained, and that they go not so far in their evil machinations as they did but four years ago in the city of Boston, where I was the humble means, under God, of loosing from the power of Satan the four children of that religious and blessed man, Mr. Goodwin. These four babes of grace were bewitched by an Irish witch ; there is no end to the narration of the torments they had to submit to. At one time they would bark like dogs, at another purr like cats ; yea, they would fly like geese, and be carried with an incredible swiftness, having but just their toes now and then upon the ground, sometimes not once in twenty feet, and their arms waved like those of a bird. Yet at other times, by the hellish devices of the woman who had bewitched them, they could not stir without limping, for, by means of an invisible chain, she hampered their limbs, or, sometimes, by means of a noose, almost choked them. One in especial was subjected by this woman of Satan to such heat as of an oven, that I myself have seen the sweat drop from off her, while all around were moderately cold and well at ease. But not to trouble you



with more of my stories, I will go on to prove that it was Satan himself that held power over her. For a very remarkable thing it was, that she was not permitted by that evil spirit to read any godly or religious book, speaking the truth as it is in Jesus. She could read Popish books well enough, while both sight and speech seemed to fail her when I gave her the Assembly's Catechism. Again, she was fond of that prelati- cal Book of Common Prayer, which is but the Roman mass-book in an English and ungodly shape. In the midst of her sufferings, if one put the Prayer-book into her hands it relieved her. Yet mark you, she could never be brought to read the Lord's Prayer, whatever book she met with it in, proving thereby distinctly that she was in league with the devil. I took her into my own house, that I, even as Dr. Martin Luther did, might wrestle with the devil and have my fling at him. But when I called my household to prayer, the devils that possessed her caused her to whistle, and sing, and yell in a discordant and hellish fashion."

At this very instant, a shrill, clear whistle pierced all ears. Dr. Mather stopped for a moment :

"Satan is among you !" he cried. "Look to yourselves !" And he prayed with fervour, as if against a present and threatening enemy ; but no one heeded him. Whence came that ominous, unearthly whistle ?

Every man watched his neighbour. Again the whistle, out of their very midst! And then a bustle in a corner of the building, three or four people stirring, without any cause immediately perceptible to those at a distance, the movement spread, and, directly after, a passage even in that dense mass of people was cleared for two men, who bore forwards Prudence Hickson, lying rigid as a log of wood, in the convulsive position of one who suffered from an epileptic fit. They laid her down among the ministers who were gathered round the pulpit. Her mother came to her, sending up a wailing cry at the sight of her distorted child. Dr. Mather came down from the pulpit and stood over her, exorcising the devil in possession, as one accustomed to such scenes. The crowd pressed forward in mute horror. At length, her rigidity of form and feature gave way, and she was terribly convulsed—torn by the devil, as they called it. By-and-by the violence of the attack was over, and the spectators began to breathe once more, though still the former horror brooded over them, and they listened as if for the sudden ominous whistle again, and glanced fearfully around, as if Satan were at their backs picking out his next victim.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mather, Pastor Tappau, and one or two others were exhorting Prudence to reveal, if she

could, the name of the person, the witch, who, by influence over Satan, had subjected the child to such torture as that which they had just witnessed. They bade her speak in the name of the Lord. She whispered a name in the low voice of exhaustion. None of the congregation could hear what it was. But the Pastor Tappau, when he heard it, drew back in dismay, while Dr. Mather, knowing not to whom the name belonged, cried out, in a clear, cold voice,

“Know ye one Lois Barclay ; for it is she who hath bewitched this poor child ?”

The answer was given rather by action than by word, although a low murmur went up from many. But all fell back, as far as falling back in such a crowd was possible, from Lois Barclay, where she stood,—and looked on her with surprise and horror. A space of some feet, where no possibility of space had seemed to be not a minute before, left Lois standing alone, with every eye fixed upon her in hatred and dread. She stood like one speechless, tongue-tied, as if in a dream. She a witch ! accursed as witches were in the sight of God and man ! Her smooth, healthy face became contracted into shrivel and pallor, but she uttered not a word, only looked at Dr. Mather with her dilated, terrified eyes.

Some one said, “She is of the household of Grace

Hickson, a God-fearing woman." Lois did not know if the words were in her favour or not. She did not think about them, even; they told less on her than on any person present. She a witch! and the silver glittering Avon, and the drowning woman she had seen in her childhood at Barford,—at home in England,—were before her, and her eyes fell before her doom. There was some commotion—some rustling of papers; the magistrates of the town were drawing near the pulpit and consulting with the ministers. Dr. Mather spoke again:

"The Indian woman, who was hung this morning, named certain people, whom she deposed to having seen at the horrible meetings for the worship of Satan; but there is no name of Lois Barclay down upon the paper, although we are stricken at the sight of the names of some——"

An interruption—a consultation. Again Dr. Mather spoke:

"Bring the accused witch, Lois Barclay, near to this poor suffering child of Christ."

They rushed forward to force Lois to the place where Prudence lay. But Lois walked forward of herself.

"Prudence," she said, in such a sweet, touching voice, that, long afterwards, those who heard it that

day, spoke of it to their children, "have I ever said an unkind word to you, much less done you an ill turn? Speak, dear child, You did not know what you said just now, did you?"

But Prudence writhed away from her approach, and screamed out, as if stricken with fresh agony,

"Take her away! take her away! Witch Lois, witch Lois, who threw me down only this morning, and turned my arm black and blue." And she bared her arm, as if in confirmation of her words. It was sorely bruised.

"I was not near you, Prudence!" said Lois, sadly. But that was only reckoned fresh evidence of her diabolical power.

Lois's brain began to get bewildered. Witch Lois! she a witch, abhorred of all men! Yet she would try to think, and make one more effort.

"Aunt Hickson," she said, and Grace came forwards—"am I a witch, Aunt Hickson?" she asked; for her aunt, stern, harsh, unloving as she might be, was truth itself, and Lois thought—so near to delirium had she come—if her aunt condemned her, it was possible she might indeed be a witch.

Grace Hickson faced her unwillingly.

"It is a stain upon our family for ever," was the thought in her mind.

"It is for God to judge whether thou art a witch, or not. Not for me."

"Alas, alas!" moaned Lois; for she had looked at Faith, and learnt that no good word was to be expected from her gloomy face and averted eyes. The meeting-house was full of eager voices, repressed, out of reverence for the place, into tones of earnest murmuring that seemed to fill the air with gathering sounds of anger, and those who had at first fallen back from the place where Lois stood were now pressing forwards and round about her, ready to seize the young friendless girl, and bear her off to prison. Those who might have been, who ought to have been, her friends, were either averse or indifferent to her; though only Prudence made any open outcry upon her. That evil child cried out perpetually that Lois had cast a devilish spell upon her, and bade them keep the witch away from her; and, indeed, Prudence was strangely convulsed when once or twice Lois's perplexed and wistful eyes were turned in her direction. Here and there girls, women uttering strange cries, and apparently suffering from the same kind of convulsive fit as that which had attacked Prudence, were centres of a group of agitated friends, who muttered much and savagely of witchcraft, and the list which had been taken down only the night before from

Hota's own lips. They demanded to have it made public, and objected to the slow forms of the law. Others, not so much or so immediately interested in the sufferers, were kneeling around, and praying aloud for themselves and their own safety, until the excitement should be so much quelled as to enable Dr. Cotton Mather to be again heard in prayer and exhortation.

And where was Manasseh? What said he? You must remember, that the stir of the outcry, the accusation, the appeals of the accused, all seemed to go on at once amid the buzz and din of the people who had come to worship God, but remained to judge and upbraid their fellow-creature. Till now Lois had only caught a glimpse of Manasseh, who was apparently trying to push forwards, but whom his mother was holding back with word and action, as Lois knew she would hold him back ; for it was not for the first time that she was made aware how carefully her aunt had always shrouded his decent reputation among his fellow-citizens from the least suspicion of his seasons of excitement and incipient insanity. On such days, when he himself imagined that he heard prophetic voices, and saw prophetic visions, his mother would do much to prevent any besides his own family from seeing him ; and now Lois, by a process swifter than

reasoning, felt certain, from her one look at his face, when she saw it, colourless and deformed by intensity of expression, among a number of others all simply ruddy and angry, that he was in such a state that his mother would in vain do her utmost to prevent his making himself conspicuous. Whatever force or argument Grace used, it was of no avail. In another moment he was by Lois's side, stammering with excitement, and giving vague testimony, which would have been of little value in a calm court of justice, and was only oil to the smouldering fire of that audience.

"Away with her to gaol!" "Seek out the witches!" "The sin has spread into all households!" "Satan is in the very midst of us!" "Strike and spare not!" In vain Dr. Cotton Mather raised his voice in loud prayers, in which he assumed the guilt of the accused girl; no one listened, all were anxious to secure Lois, as if they feared she would vanish from before their very eyes; she, white, trembling, standing quite still in the tight grasp of strange, fierce men, her dilated eyes only wandering a little now and then in search of some pitiful face—some pitiful face that among all those hundreds was not to be found. While some fetched cords to bind her, and others, by low questions, suggested new accusations to the distempered

brain of Prudence, Manasseh obtained a hearing once more. Addressing Dr. Cotton Mather, he said, evidently anxious to make clear some new argument that had just suggested itself to him: "Sir, in this matter, be she witch or not, the end has been fore-shown to me by the spirit of prophecy. Now, reverend sir, if the event be known to the spirit, it must have been foredoomed in the councils of God. If so, why punish her for doing that in which she had no free will?"

"Young man," said Dr. Mather, bending down from the pulpit and looking very severely upon Manasseh, "take care! you are trenching on blasphemy."

"I do not care. I say it again. Either Lois Barclay is a witch, or she is not. If she is, it has been foredoomed for her, for I have seen a vision of her death as a condemned witch for many months past—and the voice has told me there was but one escape for her, Lois—the voice you know——" In his excitement he began to wander a little, but it was touching to see how conscious he was that by giving way he would lose the thread of the logical argument by which he hoped to prove that Lois ought not to be punished, and with what an effort he wrenched his imagination away from the old ideas, and strove to

concentrate all his mind upon the plea that, if Lois was a witch, it had been shown him by prophecy; and if there was prophecy there must be foreknowledge; if foreknowledge, foredoom; if foredoom, no exercise of free will, and, therefore, that Lois was not justly amenable to punishment.

On he went, plunging into heresy, caring not—growing more and more passionate every instant, but directing his passion into keen argument, desperate sarcasm, instead of allowing it to excite his imagination. Even Dr. Mather felt himself on the point of being worsted in the very presence of this congregation, who, but a short half-hour ago, looked upon him as all but infallible. Keep a good heart, Cotton Mather! your opponent's eye begins to glare and flicker with a terrible yet uncertain light—his speech grows less coherent, and his arguments are mixed up with wild glimpses at wilder revelations made to himself alone. He has touched on the limits,—he has entered the borders of blasphemy, and with an awful cry of horror and reprobation the congregation rise up, as one man, against the blasphemer. Dr. Mather smiled a grim smile, and the people were ready to stone Manasseh, who went on, regardless, talking and raving.

"Stay, stay!" said Grace Hickson—all the decent family shame which prompted her to conceal the

mysterious misfortune of her only son from public knowledge done away with by the sense of the immediate danger to his life. "Touch him not. He knows not what he is saying. The fit is upon him. I tell you the truth before God. My son, my only son, is mad."

They stood aghast at the intelligence. The grave young citizen, who had silently taken his part in life close by them in their daily lives—not mixing much with them, it was true, but looked up to, perhaps, all the more—the student of abstruse books on theology, fit to converse with the most learned ministers that ever came about those parts—was he the same with the man now pouring out wild words to Lois the witch, as if he and she were the only two present! A solution of it all occurred to them. He was another victim. Great was the power of Satan! Through the arts of the devil, that white statue of a girl had mastered the soul of Manasseh Hickson. So the word-spread from mouth to mouth. And Grace heard it. It seemed a healing balsam for her shame. With wilful, dishonest blindness, she would not see—not even in her secret heart would she acknowledge, that Manasseh had been strange, and moody, and violent long before the English girl had reached Salem. She even found some specious reason for his attempt at suicide long

ago. He was recovering from a fever—and though tolerably well in health, the delirium had not finally left him. But since Lois came, how headstrong he had been at times ! how unreasonable ! how moody ! What a strange delusion was that which he was under, of being bidden by some voice to marry her ! How he followed her about, and clung to her, as under some compulsion of affection ! And over all reigned the idea that, if he were indeed suffering from being bewitched, he was not mad, and might again assume the honourable position he had held in the congregation and in the town, when the spell by which he was held was destroyed. So Grace yielded to the notion herself, and encouraged it in others, that Lois Barclay had bewitched both Manasseh and Prudence. And the consequence of this belief was, that Lois was to be tried, with little chance in her favour, to see whether she was a witch or no ; and if a witch, whether she would confess, implicate others, repent, and live a life of bitter shame, avoided by all men, and cruelly treated by most ; or die impenitent, hardened, denying her crime upon the gallows.

And so they dragged Lois away from the congregation of Christians to the gaol, to await her trial. I say “dragged her,” because, although she was docile enough to have followed them whither they would, she

was now so faint as to require extraneous force—poor Lois! who should have been carried and tended lovingly in her state of exhaustion, but, instead, was so detested by the multitude, who looked upon her as an accomplice of Satan in all his evil doings, that they cared no more how they treated her than a careless boy minds how he handles the toad that he is going to throw over the wall.

When Lois came to her full senses, she found herself lying on a short hard bed in a dark square room, which she at once knew must be a part of the city gaol. It was about eight feet square, it had stone walls on every side, and a grated opening high above her head, letting in all the light and air that could enter through about a square foot of aperture. It was so lonely, so dark to that poor girl, when she came slowly and painfully out of her long faint. She did so want human help in that struggle which always supervenes after a swoon; when the effort is to clutch at life, and the effort seems too much for the will. She did not at first understand where she was; did not understand how she came to be there, nor did she care to understand. Her physical instinct was to lie still and let the hurrying pulses have time to calm. So she shut her eyes once more. Slowly, slowly the recollection of the scene in the meeting-house shaped

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itself into a kind of picture before her. She saw within her eyelids, as it were, that sea of loathing faces all turned towards her, as towards something unclean and hateful. And you must remember, you who in the nineteenth century read this account, that witchcraft was a real terrible sin to her, Lois Barclay, two hundred years ago. The look on their faces, stamped on heart and brain, excited in her a sort of strange sympathy. Could it, oh God!—could it be true, that Satan had obtained the terrific power over her and her will, of which she had heard and read? Could she indeed be possessed by a demon and be indeed a witch, and yet till now have been unconscious of it? And her excited imagination recalled, with singular vividness, all she had ever heard on the subject—the horrible midnight sacrament, the very presence and power of Satan. Then remembering every angry thought against her neighbour, against the impertinences of Prudence, against the overbearing authority of her aunt, against the persevering crazy suit of Manasseh, the indignation—only that morning, but such ages off in real time—at Faith's injustice; oh, could such evil thoughts have had devilish power given to them by the father of evil, and, all unconsciously to herself, have gone forth as active curses into the world? And so, on the ideas went careering wildly through the poor girl's brain—the

girl thrown inward upon herself. At length, the sting of her imagination forced her to start up impatiently. What was this? A weight of iron on her legs—a weight stated afterwards, by the gaoler of Salem prison, to have been “not more than eight pounds.” It was well for Lois it was a tangible ill, bringing her back from the wild illimitable desert in which her imagination was wandering. She took hold of the iron, and saw her torn stocking,—her bruised ankle, and began to cry pitifully, out of strange compassion with herself. They feared, then, that even in that cell she would find a way to escape. Why, the utter, ridiculous impossibility of the thing convinced her of her own innocence, and ignorance of all supernatural power; and the heavy iron brought her strangely round from the delusions that seemed to be gathering about her.

No! she never could fly out of that deep dungeon; there was no escape, natural or supernatural, for her, unless by man’s mercy. And what was man’s mercy in such times of panic? Lois knew that it was nothing; instinct more than reason taught her, that panic calls out cowardice, and cowardice cruelty. Yet she cried, cried freely, and for the first time, when she found herself ironed and chained. It seemed so cruel, so much as if her fellow-creatures had really learnt to hate

and dread her—her, who had had a few angry thoughts, which God forgive ! but whose thoughts had never gone into words, far less into actions. Why, even now she could love all the household at home, if they would but let her ; yes, even yet, though she felt that it was the open accusation of Prudence and the withheld justifications of her aunt and Faith that had brought her to her present strait. Would they ever come and see her ? Would kinder thoughts of her,—who had shared their daily bread for months and months,—bring them to see her, and ask her whether it were really she who had brought on the illness of Prudence, the derangement of Manasseh's mind ?

No one came. Bread and water were pushed in by some one, who hastily locked and unlocked the door, and cared not to see if he put them within his prisoner's reach, or perhaps thought that physical fact mattered little to a witch. It was long before Lois could reach them ; and she had something of the natural hunger of youth left in her still, which prompted her, lying her length on the floor, to weary herself with efforts to obtain the bread. After she had eaten some of it, the day began to wane, and she thought she would lay her down and try to sleep. But before she did so, the gaoler heard her singing the Evening Hymn—

Glory to thee, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light.

And a dull thought came into his dull mind, that she was thankful for few blessings, if she could tune up her voice to sing praises after this day of what, if she were a witch, was shameful detection in abominable practices, and if not——Well, his mind stopped short at this point in his wondering contemplation. Lois knelt down and said the Lord's Prayer, pausing just a little before one clause, that she might be sure that in her heart of hearts she did forgive. Then she looked at her ankle, and the tears came into her eyes once again, but not so much because she was hurt, as because men must have hated her so bitterly before they could have treated her thus. Then she lay down, and fell asleep.

The next day, she was led before Mr. Hathorn and Mr. Curwin, justices of Salem, to be accused legally and publicly of witchcraft. Others were with her, under the same charge. And when the prisoners were brought in, they were cried out at by the abhorrent crowd. The two Tappaus, Prudence, and one or two other girls of the same age were there, in the character of victims of the spells of the accused. The prisoners were placed about seven or eight feet from the justices, and the accusers between the justices and

them ; the former were then ordered to stand right before the justices. All this Lois did at their bidding, with something of the wondering docility of a child, but not with any hope of softening the hard, stony look of detestation that was on all the countenances around her, save those that were distorted by more passionate anger. Then an officer was bidden to hold each of her hands, and Justice Hathorn bade her keep her eyes continually fixed on him, for this reason—which, however, was not told to her—lest, if she looked on Prudence, the girl might either fall into a fit, or cry out that she was suddenly and violently hurt. If any heart could have been touched of that cruel multitude, they would have felt some compassion for the sweet young face of the English girl, trying so meekly to do all that she was ordered, her face quite white, yet so full of sad gentleness, her grey eyes, a little dilated by the very solemnity of her position, fixed with the intent look of innocent maidenhood on the stern face of Justice Hathorn. And thus they stood in silence, one breathless minute. Then they were bidden to say the Lord's Prayer. Lois went through it as if alone in her cell ; but, as she had done alone in her cell the night before, she made a little pause, before the prayer to be forgiven as she forgave. And at this instant of hesitation—as if they had been on the watch for it—they all cried out

upon her for a witch, and when the clamour ended the justices bade Prudence Hickson come forwards. Then Lois turned a little to one side, wishing to see at least one familiar face ; but when her eyes fell upon Prudence, the girl stood stock-still, and answered no questions, nor spoke a word, and the justices declared that she was struck dumb by witchcraft. Then some behind took Prudence under the arms, and would have forced her forwards to touch Lois, possibly esteeming that as a cure for her being bewitched. But Prudence had hardly been made to take three steps before she struggled out of their arms, and fell down writhing as in a fit, calling out with shrieks, and entreating Lois to help her, and save her from her torment. Then all the girls began "to tumble down like swine" (to use the words of an eye-witness) and to cry out upon Lois and her fellow-prisoners. These last were now ordered to stand with their hands stretched out, it being imagined that if the bodies of the witches were arranged in the form of a cross they would lose their evil power. By-and-by Lois felt her strength going, from the unwonted fatigue of such a position, which she had borne patiently until the pain and weariness had forced both tears and sweat down her face, and she asked in a low, plaintive voice, if she might not rest her head for a few moments against the

wooden partition. But Justice Hathorn told her she had strength enough to torment others, and should have strength enough to stand. She sighed a little, and bore on, the clamour against her and the other accused increasing every moment ; the only way she could keep herself from utterly losing consciousness was by distracting herself from present pain and danger, and saying to herself verses of the Psalms as she could remember them, expressive of trust in God. At length she was ordered back to gaol, and dimly understood that she and others were sentenced to be hanged for witchcraft. Many people now looked eagerly at Lois, to see if she would weep at this doom. If she had had strength to cry, it might—it was just possible that it might—have been considered a plea in her favour, for witches could not shed tears, but she was too exhausted and dead. All she wanted was to lie down once more on her prison-bed, out of the reach of men's cries of abhorrence, and out of shot of their cruel eyes. So they led her back to prison, speechless and tearless.

But rest gave her back her power of thought and suffering. Was it, indeed, true that she was to die ? She, Lois Barclay, only eighteen, so well, so young, so full of love and hope as she had been, till but these little days past ! What would they think of it at home—

real, dear home at Barford, in England? There they had loved her; there she had gone about, singing and rejoicing all the day long in the pleasant meadows by the Avon side. Oh, why did father and mother die, and leave her their bidding to come here to this cruel New England shore, where no one had wanted her, no one had cared for her, and where now they were going to put her to a shameful death as a witch? And there would be no one to send kindly messages by to those she should never see more. Never more! Young Lucy was living, and joyful—probably thinking of her, and of his declared intention of coming to fetch her home to be his wife this very spring. Possibly he had forgotten her; no one knew. A week before, she would have been indignant at her own distrust in thinking for a minute that he could forget. Now, she doubted all men's goodness for a time; for those around her were deadly, and cruel, and relentless.

Then she turned round, and beat herself with angry blows (to speak in images), for ever doubting her lover. Oh! if she were but with him! Oh! if she might but be with him! He would not let her die; but would hide her in his bosom from the wrath of this people, and carry her back to the old home at Barford. And he might even now be sailing on the wide blue sea,

coming nearer, nearer every moment, and yet be too late after all.

So the thoughts chased each other through her head all that feverish night, till she clung almost deliriously to life, and wildly prayed that she might not die ; at least, not just yet, and she so young !

Pastor Tappau and certain elders roused her up from a heavy sleep, late on the morning of the following day. All night long she had trembled and cried, till morning light had come peering in through the square grating up above. It soothed her, and she fell asleep, to be awakened, as I have said, by Pastor Tappau.

“ Arise ! ” said he, scrupling to touch her, from his superstitious idea of her evil powers. “ It is noonday.”

“ Where am I ? ” said she, bewildered at this unusual waking, and the array of severe faces all gazing upon her with reprobation.

“ You are in Salem gaol, condemned for a witch.”

“ Alas ! I had forgotten for an instant,” said she, dropping her head upon her breast.

“ She has been out on a devilish ride all night long, doubtless, and is weary and perplexed this morning,” whispered one, in so low a voice that he did not think she could hear ; but she lifted up her eyes, and looked at him, with mute reproach.

"We are come," said Pastor Tappau, "to exhort you to confess your great and manifold sin."

"My great and manifold sin!" repeated Lois to herself, shaking her head.

"Yea, your sin of witchcraft. If you will confess, there may yet be balm in Gilead."

One of the elders, struck with pity at the young girl's wan, shrunken look, said, that if she confessed, and repented, and did penance, possibly her life might yet be spared.

A sudden flash of light came into her sunk, dulled eye. Might she yet live? Was it yet in her power? Why, no one knew how soon Ralph Lucy might be here, to take her away for ever into the peace of a new home! Life! Oh, then, all hope was not over—perhaps she might still live, and not die. Yet the truth came once more out of her lips, almost without any exercise of her will.

"I am not a witch," she said.

Then Pastor Tappau blindfolded her, all unresisting, but with languid wonder in her heart as to what was to come next. She heard people enter the dungeon softly, and heard whispering voices; then her hands were lifted up and made to touch some one near, and in an instant she heard a noise of struggling, and the well-known voice of Prudence shrieking out in one of her

hysterical fits, and screaming to be taken away and out of that place. It seemed to Lois as if some of her judges must have doubted of her guilt, and demanded yet another test. She sat down heavily on her bed, thinking she must be in a horrible dream, so compassed about with dangers and enemies did she seem. Those in the dungeon—and by the oppression of the air she perceived that they were many—kept on eager talking in low voices. She did not try to make out the sense of the fragments of sentences that reached her dulled brain, till, all at once, a word or two made her understand they were discussing the desirableness of applying the whip or the torture to make her confess, and reveal by what means the spell she had cast upon those whom she had bewitched could be dissolved. A thrill of affright ran through her; and she cried out, beseechingly :

“I beg you, sirs, for God’s mercy sake, that you do not use such awful means. I may say anything—nay, I may accuse any one if I am subjected to such torment as I have heard tell about. For I am but a young girl, and not very brave, or very good, as some are.”

It touched the hearts of one or two to see her standing there; the tears streaming down from below the coarse handkerchief tightly bound over her eyes; the

clanking chain fastening the heavy weight to the slight ankle ; the two hands held together as if to keep down a convulsive motion.

“Look !” said one of these. “She is weeping. They say no witch can weep tears.”

But another scoffed at this test, and bade the first remember how those of her own family, the Hicksons even, bore witness against her.

Once more she was bidden to confess. The charges, esteemed by all men (as they said) to have been proven against her, were read over to her, with all the testimony borne against her in proof thereof. They told her that, considering the godly family to which she belonged, it had been decided by the magistrates and ministers of Salem that she should have her life spared, if she would own her guilt, make reparation, and submit to penance ; but that if not, she, and others convicted of witchcraft along with her, were to be hung in Salem market-place on the next Thursday morning (Thursday being market day). And when they had thus spoken, they waited silently for her answer. It was a minute or two before she spoke. She had sat down again upon the bed meanwhile, for indeed she was very weak. She asked, “May I have this handkerchief unbound from my eyes, for indeed, sirs, it hurts me ?”

The occasion for which she was blindfolded being over, the bandage was taken off, and she was allowed to see. She looked pitifully at the stern faces around her, in grim suspense as to what her answer would be. Then she spoke :

“Sirs, I must choose death with a quiet conscience, rather than life to be gained by a lie. I am not a witch. I know not hardly what you mean when you say I am. I have done many, many things very wrong in my life ; but I think God will forgive me them for my Saviour’s sake.”

“Take not His name on your wicked lips,” said Pastor Tappau, enraged at her resolution of not confessing, and scarcely able to keep himself from striking her. She saw the desire he had, and shrank away in timid fear. Then Justice Hathorn solemnly read the legal condemnation of Lois Barclay to death by hanging, as a convicted witch. She murmured something which nobody heard fully, but which sounded like a prayer for pity and compassion on her tender years and friendless estate. Then they left her to all the horrors of that solitary, loathsome dungeon, and the strange terror of approaching death.

Outside the prison walls, the dread of the witches, and the excitement against witchcraft, grew with fearful rapidity. Numbers of women, and men, too, were

accused, no matter what their station of life and their former character had been. On the other side, it is alleged that upwards of fifty persons were grievously vexed by the devil, and those to whom he had imparted of his power for vile and wicked considerations. How much of malice, distinct, unmistakable personal malice, was mixed up with these accusations, no one can now tell. The dire statistics of this time tell us, that fifty-five escaped death by confessing themselves guilty, one hundred and fifty were in prison, more than two hundred accused, and upwards of twenty suffered death, among whom was the minister I have called Nolan, who was traditionally esteemed to have suffered through hatred of his co-pastor. One old man, scorning the accusation, and refusing to plead at his trial, was, according to the law, pressed to death for his contumacy. Nay, even dogs were accused of witchcraft, suffered the legal penalties, and are recorded among the subjects of capital punishment. One young man found means to effect his mother's escape from confinement, fled with her on horseback, and secreted her in the Blueberry Swamp, not far from Taplay's Brook, in the Great Pasture; he concealed her here in a wigwam which he built for her shelter, provided her with food and clothing, and comforted and sustained her until after the delusion had passed

away. The poor creature must, however, have suffered dreadfully, for one of her arms was fractured in the all but desperate effort of getting her out of prison.

But there was no one to try and save Lois. Grace Hickson would fain have ignored her altogether. Such a taint did witchcraft bring upon a whole family, that generations of blameless life were not at that day esteemed sufficient to wash it out. Besides, you must remember that Grace, along with most people of her time, believed most firmly in the reality of the crime of witchcraft. Poor, forsaken Lois, believed in it herself, and it added to her terror, for the gaoler, in an unusually communicative mood, told her that nearly every cell was now full of witches; and it was possible he might have to put one, if more came, in with her. Lois knew that she was no witch herself; but not the less did she believe that the crime was abroad, and largely shared in by evil-minded persons who had chosen to give up their souls to Satan; and she shuddered with terror at what the gaoler said, and would have asked him to spare her this companionship if it were possible. But, somehow, her senses were leaving her, and she could not remember the right words in which to form her request, until he had left the place.

The only person who yearned after Lois—who would have befriended her if he could—was Manasseh : poor, mad Manasseh. But he was so wild and outrageous in his talk, that it was all his mother could do to keep his state concealed from public observation. She had for this purpose given him a sleeping potion ; and, while he lay heavy and inert under the influence of the poppy-tea, his mother bound him with cords to the ponderous, antique bed in which he slept. She looked broken-hearted while she did this office, and thus acknowledged the degradation of her first-born—him of whom she had ever been so proud.

Late that evening, Grace Hickson stood in Lois's cell, hooded and cloaked up to her eyes. Lois was sitting quite still, playing idly with a bit of string which one of the magistrates had dropped out of his pocket that morning. Her aunt was standing by her for an instant or two in silence, before Lois seemed aware of her presence. Suddenly she looked up, and uttered a little cry, shrinking away from the dark figure. Then, as if her cry had loosened Grace's tongue, she began :

“ Lois Barclay, did I ever do you any harm ?” Grace did not know how often her want of loving-kindness had pierced the tender heart of the stranger under her roof ; nor did Lois remember it against her

now. Instead, Lois's memory was filled with grateful thoughts of how much that might have been left undone, by a less conscientious person, her aunt had done for her, and she half stretched out her arms as to a friend in that desolate place, while she answered :—

“Oh no, no ! you were very good ! very kind !”

But Grace stood immovable.

“I did you no harm, although I never rightly knew why you came to us.”

“I was sent by my mother on her death-bed,” moaned Lois, covering her face. It grew darker every instant. Her aunt stood, still and silent.

“Did any of mine ever wrong you ?” she asked, after a time.

“No, no ; never, till Prudence said——Oh, aunt, do you think I am a witch ?” And now Lois was standing up, holding by Grace's cloak, and trying to read her face. Grace drew herself, ever so little, away from the girl, whom she dreaded, and yet sought to propitiate.

“Wiser than I, godlier than I, have said it. But, oh, Lois, Lois ! he was my first-born. Loose him from the demon, for the sake of Him whose name I dare not name in this terrible building, filled with them who have renounced the hopes of their baptism ;

loose Manasseh from his awful state, if ever I or mine did you a kindness !”

“ You ask me for Christ’s sake,” said Lois. “ I can name that holy name—for oh, aunt ! indeed, and in holy truth, I am no witch ; and yet I am to die—to be hanged ! Aunt, do not let them kill me ! I am so young, and I never did any one any harm that I know of.”

“ Hush ! for very shame ! This afternoon I have bound my first-born with strong cords, to keep him from doing himself or us a mischief—he is so frenzied. Lois Barclay, look here !” and Grace knelt down at her niece’s feet, and joined her hands as if in prayer—“ I am a proud woman, God forgive me ! and I never thought to kneel to any save to Him. And now I kneel at your feet, to pray you to release my children, more especially my son Manasseh, from the spells you have put upon them. Lois, hearken to me, and I will pray to the Almighty for you, if yet there may be mercy.”

“ I cannot do it ; I never did you or yours any wrong. How can I undo it ? How can I ?” And she wrung her hands in intensity of conviction of the inutility of aught she could do.

Here Grace got up, slowly, stiffly, and sternly. She stood aloof from the chained girl, in the remote corner

of the prison cell near the door, ready to make her escape as soon as she had cursed the witch, who would not, or could not, undo the evil she had wrought. Grace lifted up her right hand, and held it up on high, as she doomed Lois to be accursed for ever, for her deadly sin, and her want of mercy even at this final hour. And, lastly, she summoned her to meet her at the judgment-seat, and answer for this deadly injury done to both souls and bodies of those who had taken her in, and received her when she came to them an orphan and a stranger.

Until this last summons, Lois had stood as one who hears her sentence and can say nothing against it, for she knows all would be in vain. But she raised her head when she heard her aunt speak of the judgment-seat, and at the end of Grace's speech she, too, lifted up her right hand, as if solemnly pledging herself by that action, and replied :

"Aunt ! I will meet you there. And there you will know my innocence of this deadly thing. God have mercy on you and yours !"

Her calm voice maddened Grace, and making a gesture as if she plucked up a handful of dust off the floor, and threw it at Lois, she cried :

"Witch ! witch ! ask mercy for thyself—I need not your prayers. Witches' prayers are read backwards.

I spit at thee, and defy thee!" And so she went away.

Lois sat moaning that whole night through. "God comfort me! God strengthen me!" was all she could remember to say. She just felt that want, nothing more,—all other fears and wants seemed dead within her. And when the gaoler brought in her breakfast the next morning, he reported her as "gone silly;" for, indeed, she did not seem to know him, but kept rocking herself to and fro, and whispering softly to herself, smiling a little from time to time.

But God did comfort her, and strengthen her too. Late on that Wednesday afternoon, they thrust another "witch" into her cell, bidding the two, with opprobrious words, keep company together. The new comer fell prostrate with the push given her from without; and Lois, not recognizing anything but an old ragged woman lying helpless on her face on the ground, lifted her up; and lo! it was Nattee—dirty, filthy indeed, mud-pelted, stone-bruised, beaten, and all astray in her wits with the treatment she had received from the mob outside. Lois held her in her arms, and softly wiped the old brown wrinkled face with her apron, crying over it, as she had hardly yet cried over her own sorrows. For hours she tended the old Indian woman—tended her bodily woes; and as the poor

scattered senses of the savage creature came slowly back, Lois gathered her infinite dread of the morrow, when she too, as well as Lois, was to be led out to die, in face of all that infuriated crowd. Lois sought in her own mind for some source of comfort for the old woman, who shook like one in the shaking palsy at the dread of death—and such a death.

When all was quiet through the prison, in the deep dead midnight, the gaoler outside the door heard Lois telling, as if to a young child, the marvellous and sorrowful story of one who died on the cross for us and for our sakes. As long as she spoke, the Indian woman's terror seemed lulled; but the instant she paused, for weariness, Nattee cried out afresh, as if some wild beast were following her close through the dense forests in which she had dwelt in her youth. And then Lois went on, saying all the blessed words she could remember, and comforting the helpless Indian woman with the sense of the presence of a Heavenly Friend. And in comforting her, Lois was comforted; in strengthening her, Lois was strengthened.

The morning came, and the summons to come forth and die came. They who entered the cell found Lois asleep, her face resting on the slumbering old woman, whose head she still held in her lap. She did not seem clearly to recognize where she was, when she

awakened ; the "silly" look had returned to her wan face ; all she appeared to know was, that somehow or another, through some peril or another, she had to protect the poor Indian woman. She smiled faintly when she saw the bright light of the April day ; and put her arm round Nattee, and tried to keep the Indian quiet with hushing, soothing words of broken meaning, and holy fragments of the Psalms. Nattee tightened her hold upon Lois as they drew near the gallows, and the outrageous crowd below began to hoot and yell. Lois redoubled her efforts to calm and encourage Nattee, apparently unconscious that any of the opprobrium, the hootings, the stones, the mud, was directed towards her herself. But when they took Nattee from her arms, and led her out to suffer first, Lois seemed all at once to recover her sense of the present terror. She gazed wildly around, stretched out her arms as if to some person in the distance, who was yet visible to her, and cried out once with a voice that thrilled through all who heard it, "Mother !" Directly afterwards, the body of Lois the Witch swung in the air, and every one stood, with hushed breath, with a sudden wonder, like a fear of deadly crime, fallen upon them.

The stillness and the silence were broken by one crazed and mad, who came rushing up the steps of the ladder, and caught Lois's body in his arms, and kissed

her lips with wild passion. And then, as if it were true what the people believed, that he was possessed by a demon, he sprang down, and rushed through the crowd, out of the bounds of the city, and into the dark dense forest, and Manasseh Hickson was no more seen of Christian man.

The people of Salem had awakened from their frightful delusion before the autumn, when Captain Holdernessee and Ralph Lucy came to find out Lois, and bring her home to peaceful Barford, in the pleasant country of England. Instead, they led them to the grassy grave where she lay at rest, done to death by mistaken men. Ralph Lucy shook the dust off his feet in quitting Salem, with a heavy, heavy heart; and lived a bachelor all his life long for her sake.

Long years afterwards, Captain Holdernessee sought him out, to tell him some news that he thought might interest the grave miller of the Avonside. Captain Holdernessee told him that in the previous year, it was then 1713, the sentence of excommunication against the witches of Salem was ordered, in godly sacramental meeting of the church, to be erased and blotted out, and that those who met together for this purpose "humbly requested the merciful God would pardon whatsoever sin, error, or mistake was in the application of justice, through our merciful High Priest, who

knoweth how to have compassion on the ignorant, and those that are out of the way." He also said that Prudence Hickson—now woman grown—had made a most touching and pungent declaration of sorrow and repentance before the whole church, for the false and mistaken testimony she had given in several instances, among which she particularly mentioned that of her cousin Lois Barclay. To all which Ralph Lucy only answered :

"No repentance of theirs can bring her back to life."

Then Captain Holderness took out a paper, and read the following humble and solemn declaration of regret on the part of those who signed it, among whom Grace Hickson was one :

"We, whose names are undersigned, being, in the year 1692, called to serve as jurors in court of Salem, on trial of many who were by some suspected guilty of doing acts of witchcraft upon the bodies of sundry persons ; we confess that we ourselves were not capable to understand, nor able to withstand, the mysterious delusions of the powers of darkness, and prince of the air, but were, for want of knowledge in ourselves, and better information from others, prevailed with to take up with such evidence against the accused, as, on further consideration, and better information, we justly

fear was insufficient for the touching the lives of any (Deut. xvii. 6), whereby we fear we have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon ourselves and this people of the Lord the guilt of innocent blood ; which sin, the Lord saith in Scripture, he would not pardon (2 Kings, xxiv. 4), that is, we suppose, in regard of his temporal judgments. We do, therefore, signify to all in general (and to the surviving sufferers in special) our deep sense of, and sorrow for, our errors, in acting on such evidence to the condemning of any person ; and do hereby declare, that we justly fear that we were sadly deluded and mistaken, for which we are much disquieted and distressed in our minds, and do therefore humbly beg forgiveness, first of God for Christ's sake, for this our error ; and pray that God would not impute the guilt of it to ourselves nor others ; and we also pray that we may be considered candidly and aright by the living sufferers, as being then under the power of a strong and general delusion, utterly unacquainted with, and not experienced in, matters of that nature.

“We do heartily ask forgiveness of you all, whom we have justly offended ; and do declare, according to our present minds, we would none of us do such things again on such grounds for the whole world ; praying you to accept of this in way of satisfaction for our

offence, and that you would bless the inheritance of the Lord, that he may be entreated for the land.

“Foreman, THOMAS FISK, &c.”

To the reading of this paper Ralph Lucy made no reply save this, even more gloomily than before :

“All their repentance will avail nothing to my Lois, nor will it bring back her life.”

Then Captain Holderness spoke once more, and said that on the day of the general fast, appointed to be held all through New England, when the meeting-houses were crowded, an old, old man with white hair had stood up in the place in which he was accustomed to worship, and had handed up into the pulpit a written confession, which he had once or twice essayed to read for himself, acknowledging his great and grievous error in the matter of the witches of Salem, and praying for the forgiveness of God and of his people, ending with an entreaty that all then present would join with him in prayer that his past conduct might not bring down the displeasure of the Most High upon his country, his family, or himself. That old man, who was no other than Justice Sewall, remained standing all the time that his confession was read ; and at the end he said, “The good and gracious God be pleased to save New England and me and my family.” And

then it came out that, for years past, Judge Sewall had set apart a day for humiliation and prayer, to keep fresh in his mind a sense of repentance and sorrow for the part he had borne in these trials, and that this solemn anniversary he was pledged to keep as long as he lived, to show his feeling of deep humiliation.

Ralph Lucy's voice trembled as he spoke: "All this will not bring my Lois to life again, or give me back the hope of my youth."

But—as Captain Holderness shook his head (for what word could he say, or how dispute what was so evidently true?)—Ralph added, "What is the day, know you, that this justice has set apart?"

"The twenty-ninth of April."

"Then on that day will I, here at Barford in England, join my prayers as long as I live with the repentant judge, that his sin may be blotted out and no more had in remembrance. She would have willed it so."

THE CROOKED BRANCH.

NOR many years after the beginning of this century, a worthy couple of the name of Huntroyd occupied a small farm in the North Riding of Yorkshire. They had married late in life, although they were very young when they first began to "keep company" with each other. Nathan Huntroyd had been farm servant to Hester Rose's father, and had made up to her at a time when her parents thought she might do better; and so, without much consultation of her feelings, they had dismissed Nathan in somewhat cavalier fashion. He had drifted far away from his former connections, when an uncle of his died, leaving Nathan—by this time upwards of forty years of age—enough money to stock a small farm, and yet have something over to put in the bank against bad times. One of the consequences of this bequest was, that Nathan was

looking out for a wife and housekeeper, in a kind of discreet and leisurely way, when, one day, he heard that his old love, Hester, was—not married and flourishing, as he had always supposed her to be—but a poor maid-of-all-work, in the town of Ripon. For her father had had a succession of misfortunes, which had brought him in his old age to the work-house; her mother was dead; her only brother struggling to bring up a large family; and Hester herself, a hard-working, homely-looking (at thirty-seven) servant. Nathan had a kind of growling satisfaction (which only lasted for a minute or two, however) in hearing of these turns of Fortune's wheel. He did not make many intelligible remarks to his informant, and to no one else did he say a word. But, a few days afterwards, he presented himself, dressed in his Sunday best, at Mrs. Thompson's back door in Ripon.

Hester stood there, in answer to the good sound knock his good sound oak stick made; she with the light full upon her, he in shadow. For a moment there was silence. He was scanning the face and figure of his old love, for twenty years unseen. The comely beauty of youth had faded away entirely; she was, as I have said, homely-looking, plain-featured, but with a clean skin, and pleasant, frank eyes. Her figure was no longer round, but tidily draped in a

blue and white bedgown, tied round her waist by her white apron-strings, and her short red linsey petticoat showed her tidy feet and ankles. Her former lover fell into no ecstasies. He simply said to himself, "She'll do ;" and forthwith began upon his business.

"Hester, thou dost not mind me. I am Nathan, as thy father turned off at a minute's notice, for thinking of thee for a wife, twenty year come Michaelmas next. I have not thought much upon matrimony since. But Uncle Ben has died, leaving me a small matter in the bank ; and I have taken Nab-end Farm, and put in a bit of stock, and shall want a missus to see after it. Wilt like to come ? I'll not mislead thee. It's dairy, and it might have been arable. But arable takes more horses nor it suited me to buy, and I'd the offer of a tidy lot of kine. That's all. If thou'lt have me, I'll come for thee as soon as the hay is gotten in."

Hester only said, "Come in, and sit thee down."

He came in, and sat down. For a time, she took no more notice of him than of his stick, bustling about to get dinner ready for the family whom she served. He meanwhile watched her brisk, sharp movements, and repeated to himself, "She'll do !" After about twenty minutes of silence thus employed, he got up, saying :

"Well, Hester, I'm going. When shall I come back again?"

"Please thyself, and thou'll please me," said Hester, in a tone that she tried to make light and indifferent; but he saw that her colour came and went, and that she trembled while she moved about. In another moment Hester was soundly kissed; but when she looked round to scold the middle-aged farmer, he appeared so entirely composed that she hesitated. He said:

"I have pleased myself, and thee too, I hope. Is it a month's wage, and a month's warning? To-day is the eighth. July eighth is our wedding-day. I have no time to spend a-wooing before then, and wedding must na take long. Two days is enough to throw away, at our time o' life."

It was like a dream; but Hester resolved not to think more about it till her work was done. And when all was cleaned up for the evening, she went and gave her mistress warning, telling her all the history of her life in a very few words. That day month she was married from Mrs. Thompson's house.

The issue of the marriage was one boy, Benjamin. A few years after his birth, Hester's brother died at Leeds, leaving ten or twelve children. Hester sorrowed bitterly over this loss; and Nathan showed her much quiet sympathy, although he could not but remember that Jack Rose had added insult to the bitterness of his youth. He helped his wife to make ready to

go by the waggon to Leeds. He made light of the household difficulties, which came thronging into her mind after all was fixed for her departure. He filled her purse, that she might have wherewithal to alleviate the immediate wants of her brother's family. And as she was leaving, he ran after the waggon. "Stop, stop!" he cried. "Hetty, if thou wilt—if it wunnot be too much for thee—bring back one of Jack's wenches for company, like. We've enough and to spare; and a lass will make the house winsome, as a man may say."

The waggon moved on; while Hester had such a silent swelling of gratitude in her heart, as was both thanks to her husband, and thanksgiving to God.

And that was the way that little Bessy Rose came to be an inmate of the Nab's-end Farm.

Virtue met with its own reward in this instance, and in a clear and tangible shape, too, which need not delude people in general into thinking that such is the usual nature of virtue's rewards. Bessy grew up a bright, affectionate, active girl; a daily comfort to her uncle and aunt. She was so much a darling in the household that they even thought her worthy of their only son Benjamin, who was perfection in their eyes. It is not often the case that two plain, homely people have a child of uncommon beauty; but it is so sometimes,

and Benjamin Huntroyd was one of these exceptional cases. The hard-working, labour-and-care-marked farmer, and the mother, who could never have been more than tolerably comely in her best days, produced a boy who might have been an earl's son for grace and beauty. Even the hunting squires of the neighbourhood reined up their horses to admire him, as he opened the gates for them. He had no shyness, he was so accustomed to admiration from strangers, and adoration from his parents from his earliest years. As for Bessy Rose, he ruled imperiously over her heart from the time she first set eyes on him. And as she grew older, she grew on in loving, persuading herself that what her uncle and aunt loved so dearly it was her duty to love dearest of all. At every unconscious symptom of the young girl's love for her cousin, his parents smiled and winked: all was going on as they wished, no need to go far afield for Benjamin's wife. The household could go on as it was now; Nathan and Hester sinking into the rest of years, and relinquishing care and authority to those dear ones, who, in process of time, might bring other dear ones to share their love.

But Benjamin took it all very coolly. He had been sent to a day-school in the neighbouring town—a grammar-school, in the high state of neglect in which

the majority of such schools were thirty years ago. Neither his father nor his mother knew much of learning. All that they knew (and that directed their choice of a school) was, that they could not, by any possibility, part with their darling to a boarding-school; that some schooling he must have, and that Squire Pollard's son went to Highminster Grammar School. Squire Pollard's son, and many another son destined to make his parents' hearts ache, went to this school. If it had not been so utterly bad a place of education, the simple farmer and his wife might have found it out sooner. But not only did the pupils there learn vice, they also learnt deceit. Benjamin was naturally too clever to remain a dunce, or else, if he had chosen so to be, there was nothing in Highminster Grammar School to hinder his being a dunce of the first water. But, to all appearance, he grew clever and gentleman-like. His father and mother were even proud of his airs and graces, when he came home for the holidays; taking them for proofs of his refinement, although the practical effect of such refinement was to make him express his contempt for his parents' homely ways and simple ignorance. By the time he was eighteen, an articled clerk in an attorney's office at Highminster,—for he had quite declined becoming a “mere clod-hopper,” that is to say a hard-working, honest farmer

like his father—Bessy Rose was the only person who was dissatisfied with him. The little girl of fourteen instinctively felt there was something wrong about him. Alas! two years more, and the girl of sixteen worshipped his very shadow, and would not see that aught could be wrong with one so soft-spoken, so handsome, so kind as Cousin Benjamin. For Benjamin had discovered that the way to cajole his parents out of money for every indulgence he fancied, was to pretend to forward their innocent scheme, and make love to his pretty cousin Bessy Rose. He cared just enough for her to make this work of necessity not disagreeable at the time he was performing it. But he found it tiresome to remember her little claims upon him, when she was no longer present. The letters he had promised her during his weekly absences at Highminster, the trifling commissions she had asked him to do for her, were all considered in the light of troubles; and, even when he was with her, he resented the inquiries she made as to his mode of passing his time, or what female acquaintances he had in Highminster.

When his apprenticeship was ended, nothing would serve him but that he must go up to London for a year or two. Poor Farmer Huntroyd was beginning to repent of his ambition of making his son Benjamin a gentleman. But it was too late to repine now. Both

father and mother felt this, and, however sorrowful they might be, they were silent, neither demurring nor assenting to Benjamin's proposition when first he made it. But Bessy, through her tears, noticed that both her uncle and aunt seemed unusually tired that night, and sat hand-in-hand on the fireside settle, idly gazing into the bright flame, as if they saw in it pictures of what they had once hoped their lives would have been. Bessy rattled about among the supper things, as she put them away after Benjamin's departure, making more noise than usual—as if noise and bustle was what she needed to keep her from bursting out crying—and, having at one keen glance taken in the position and looks of Nathan and Hester, she avoided looking in that direction again, for fear the sight of their wistful faces should make her own tears overflow.

“Sit thee down, lass—sit thee down. Bring the creepie-stool to the fireside, and let's have a bit of talk over the lad's plans,” said Nathan, at last rousing himself to speak. Bessy came and sat down in front of the fire, and threw her apron over her face, as she rested her head on both hands. Nathan felt as if it was a chance which of the two women burst out crying first. So he thought he would speak, in hopes of keeping off the infection of tears.

"Didst ever hear of this mad plan afore, Bessy?"

"No, never!" Her voice came muffled, and changed from under her apron. Hester felt as if the tone, both of question and answer, implied blame, and this she could not bear.

"We should ha' looked to it when we bound him, for of necessity it would ha' come to this. There's examins, and catechizes, and I dunno what all for him to be put through in London. It's not his fault."

"Which on us said it were?" asked Nathan, rather put out. "Thof, for that matter, a few weeks would carry him over the mire, and make him as good a lawyer as any judge among 'em. Oud Lawson the attorney told me that, in a talk I had wi' him a bit sin. Na, na! it's the lad's own hankering after London that makes him want for to stay there for a year, let alone two."

Nathan shook his head.

"And if it be his own hankering," said Bessy, putting down her apron, her face all aflame, and her eyes swollen up, "I dunnot see harm in it. Lads aren't like lasses, to be teed to their own fireside like th' crook yonder. It's fitting for a young man to go abroad and see the world afore he settles down."

Hester's hand sought Bessy's, and the two women sat in sympathetic defiance of any blame that should

be thrown on the beloved absent. Nathan only said :

“Nay, wench, dunna wax up so ; whatten’s done ’s done ; and worse, it’s my doing. I mun needs make my bairn a gentleman ; and we mun pay for it.”

“Dear uncle ! he wunna spend much, I’ll answer for it ; and I’ll scrimp and save i’ th’ house to make it good.”

“Wench !” said Nathan, solemnly, “it were not paying in cash I were speaking on : it were paying in heart’s care, and heaviness of soul. Lunnon is a place where the devil keeps court as well as King George ; and my poor chap has more nor once welly fallen into his clutches here. I dunno what he’ll do when he gets close within sniff of him.”

“Don’t let him go, father !” said Hester, for the first time taking this view. Hitherto she had only thought of her own grief at parting with him. “Father, if you think so, keep him here, safe under our own eye.”

“Nay !” said Nathan, “he’s past time o’ life for that. Why, there’s not one on us knows where he is at this present time, and he not gone out of our sight an hour. He’s too big to be put back i’ th’ go-cart, mother, or kept within doors with the chair turned bottom upwards.”

"I wish he were a wee bairn lying in my arms again. It were a sore day when I weaned him; and I think life's been gettin' sorer and sorer at every turn he's ta'en towards manhood."

"Coom, lass, that's noan the way to be talking. Be thankful to Marcy that thou'st gotten a man for thy son as stands five foot eleven in's stockings, and ne'er a sick piece about him. We wunnot grudge him his fling, will we, Bess, my wench? He'll be coming back in a year, or maybe a bit more; and be a' for settlin' in a quiet town like, wi' a wife that's noan so fur fra' me at this very minute. An' we oud folk, as we get into years, must gi' up farm, and tak a bit on a house near Lawyer Benjamin."

And so the good Nathan, his own heart heavy enough, tried to soothe his womenkind. But of the three, his eyes were longest in closing; his apprehensions the deepest founded.

"I misdoubt me I hanna done well by th' lad. I misdoubt me sore," was the thought that kept him awake till day began to dawn. "Summat's wrong about him, or folk would na look at me wi' such piteous-like een when they speak on him. I can see th' meaning of it, thof I'm too proud to let on. And Lawson, too, he holds his tongue more nor he should do, when I ax him how my lad's getting on, and

whatten sort of a lawyer he'll mak. God be marciful to Hester an' me, if th' lad's gone away! God be marciful! But maybe it's this lying waking a' the night through, that maks me so fearfu'. Why, when I were his age, I daur be bound I should ha' spent money fast enoof, i' I could ha' come by it. But I had to arn it; that maks a great differ'. Well! It were hard to thwart th' child of our old age, and we waitin' so long for to have 'un!"

Next morning, Nathan rode Moggy, the cart horse, into Highminster to see Mr. Lawson. Anybody who saw him ride out of his own yard, would have been struck with the change in him which was visible, when he returned; a change, more than a day's unusual exercise should have made in a man of his years. He scarcely held the reins at all. One jerk of Moggy's head would have plucked them out of his hands. His head was bent forward, his eyes looking on some unseen thing, with long unwinking gaze. But as he drew near home on his return, he made an effort to recover himself.

"No need fretting them," he said; "lads will be lads. But I didna think he had it in him to be so thowtless, young as he is. Well, well! he'll maybe get more wisdom i' Lunnon. Anyways it's best to cu him off fra such evil lads as Will Hawker, and such-

like. It's they as have led my boy astray. He were a good chap till he knowed them—a good chap till he knowed them."

But he put all his cares in the background when he came into the houseplace, where both Bessy and his wife met him at the door, and both would fain lend a hand to take off his greatcoat.

"Theer, wenches, theer! ye might let a man alone for to get out on's clothes! Why, I might ha' struck thee, lass." And he went on talking, trying to keep them off for a time from the subject that all had at heart. But there was no putting them off for ever; and, by dint of repeated questioning on his wife's part, more was got out than he had ever meant to tell—enough to grieve both his hearers sorely: and yet the brave old man still kept the worst in his own breast.

The next day Benjamin came home for a week or two, before making his great start to London. His father kept him at a distance, and was solemn and quiet in his manner to the young man. Bessy, who had shown anger enough at first, and had uttered many a sharp speech, began to relent, and then to feel hurt and displeased that her uncle should persevere so long in his cold, reserved manner, and Benjamin just going to leave them. Her aunt went, tremblingly busy, about the clothes-presses and drawers, as if

afraid of letting herself think either of the past or the future ; only once or twice, coming behind her son, she suddenly stooped over his sitting figure, and kissed his cheek, and stroked his hair. Bessy remembered afterwards—long years afterwards—how he had tossed his head away with nervous irritability on one of these occasions, and had muttered—her aunt did not hear it, but Bessy did—

“ Can’t you leave a man alone ? ”

Towards Bessy herself he was pretty gracious. No other words express his manner : it was not warm, nor tender, nor cousinly, but there was an assumption of underbred politeness towards her as a young, pretty woman ; which politeness was neglected in his authoritative or grumbling manner towards his mother, or his sullen silence before his father. He once or twice ventured on a compliment to Bessy on her personal appearance. She stood still, and looked at him with astonishment.

“ How’s my eyes changed sin last thou sawst them,” she asked, “ that thou must be telling me about ’em i’ that fashion ? I’d rayther by a deal see thee helping thy mother when she’s dropped her knitting-needle and canna see i’ th’ dusk for to pick it up.”

But Bessy thought of his pretty speech about her eyes long after he had forgotten making it, and would

have been puzzled to tell the colour of them. Many a day, after he was gone, did she look earnestly in the little oblong looking-glass, which hung up against the wall of her little sleeping-chamber, but which she used to take down in order to examine the eyes he had praised, murmuring to herself, "Pretty soft grey eyes! Pretty soft grey eyes!" until she would hang up the glass again with a sudden laugh and a rosy blush.

In the days, when he had gone away to the vague distance and vaguer place—the city called London—Bessy tried to forget all that had gone against her feeling of the affection and duty that a son owed to his parents; and she had many things to forget of this kind that would keep surging up into her mind. For instance, she wished that he had not objected to the home-spun, home-made shirts which his mother and she had had such pleasure in getting ready for him. He might not know, it was true—and so her love urged—how carefully and evenly the thread had been spun: how, not content with bleaching the yarn in the sunniest meadow, the linen, on its return from the weaver's, had been spread out afresh on the sweet summer grass, and watered carefully night after night when there was no dew to perform the kindly office. He did not know—for no one but Bessy herself did—how many false or large stitches, made large and false

by her aunt's failing eyes (who yet liked to do the choicest part of the stitching all by herself), Bessy had unpicked at night in her own room, and with dainty fingers had restitched ; sewing eagerly in the dead of night. All this he did not know ; or he could never have complained of the coarse texture ; the old-fashioned make of these shirts ; and urged on his mother to give him part of her little store of egg and butter money in order to buy newer-fashioned linen in Highminster.

When once that little precious store of his mother's was discovered, it was well for Bessy's peace of mind that she did not know how loosely her aunt counted up the coins, mistaking guineas for shillings, or just the other way, so that the amount was seldom the same in the old black spoutless teapot. Yet this son, this hope, this love, had still a strange power of fascination over the household. The evening before he left, he sat between his parents, a hand in theirs on either side, and Bessy on the old creepie-stool, her head lying on her aunt's knee, and looking up at him from time to time, as if to learn his face off by heart ; till his glances meeting hers, made her drop her eyes, and only sigh.

He stopped up late that night with his father, long after the women had gone to bed. But not to sleep ; for I will answer for it the grey-haired mother never

slept a wink till the late dawn of the autumn day, and Bessy heard her uncle come up stairs with heavy, deliberate footsteps, and go to the old stocking which served him for bank ; and count out golden guineas—once he stopped, but again he went on afresh, as if resolved to crown his gift with liberality. Another long pause—in which she could but indistinctly hear continued words, it might have been advice, it might be a prayer, for it was in her uncle's voice ; and then father and son came up to bed. Bessy's room was but parted from her cousin's by a thin wooden partition ; and the last sound she distinctly heard, before her eyes, tired out with crying, closed themselves in sleep, was the guineas clinking down upon each other at regular intervals, as if Benjamin were playing at pitch and toss with his father's present.

After he was gone, Bessy wished he had asked her to walk part of the way with him into Highminster. She was all ready, her things laid out on the bed ; but she could not accompany him without invitation.

The little household tried to close over the gap as best they might. They seemed to set themselves to their daily work with unusual vigour ; but somehow when evening came there had been little done. Heavy hearts never make light work, and there was no telling how much care and anxiety each had had to bear in

secret in the field, at the wheel, or in the dairy. Formerly he was looked for every Saturday; looked for, though he might not come, or if he came, there were things to be spoken about, that made his visit anything but a pleasure: still he might come, and all things might go right, and then what sunshine, what gladness to those humble people! But now he was away, and dreary winter was come on; old folks' sight fails, and the evenings were long, and sad, in spite of all Bessy could do or say. And he did not write so often as he might—so every one thought; though every one would have been ready to defend him from either of the others who had expressed such a thought aloud. "Surely!" said Bessy to herself, when the first primroses peeped out in a sheltered and sunny hedge-bank, and she gathered them as she passed home from afternoon church—"surely, there never will be such a dreary, miserable winter again as this has been." There had been a great change in Nathan and Bessy Huntroyd during this last year. The spring before, when Benjamin was yet the subject of more hopes than fears, his father and mother looked what I may call an elderly middle-aged couple: people who had a good deal of hearty work in them yet. Now—it was not his absence alone that caused the change—they looked frail and old, as if each day's

natural trouble was a burden more than they could bear. For Nathan had heard sad reports about his only child, and had told them solemnly to his wife, as things too bad to be believed, and yet, "God help us, if indeed he is such a lad as this!" Their eyes were become too dry and hollow for many tears; they sat together, hand in hand; and shivered, and sighed, and did not speak many words, or dare to look at each other: and then Hester had said:

"We mauna tell th' lass. Young folks' hearts break wi' a little, and she'd be apt to fancy it were true." Here the old woman's voice broke into a kind of piping cry, but she struggled, and her next words were all right. "We mauna tell her; he's bound to be fond on her, and may-be, if she thinks well on him, and loves him, it will bring him straight!"

"God grant it!" said Nathan.

"God shall grant it!" said Hester, passionately moaning out her words; and then repeating them, alas! with a vain repetition.

"It's a bad place for lying, is Highminster," said she at length, as if impatient of the silence. "I never knowed such a place for getting up stories. But Bessy knows nought on, and nother you nor me belie'es 'em; that's one blessing."

But if they did not in their hearts believe them, how

came they to look so sad, and worn, beyond what mere age could make them?

Then came round another year, another winter, yet more miserable than the last. This year, with the primroses, came Benjamin; a bad, hard, flippant young man, with yet enough of specious manners and handsome countenance to make his appearance striking at first to those to whom the aspect of a London fast young man of the lowest order is strange and new. Just at first, as he sauntered in with a swagger and an air of indifference, which was partly assumed, partly real, his old parents felt a simple kind of awe of him, as if he were not their son, but a real gentleman; but they had too much fine instinct in their homely natures not to know, after a very few minutes had passed, that this was not a true prince.

"Whatten ever does he mean," said Hester to her niece, as soon as they were alone, "by a' them maks and wearlocks? And he minces his words as if his tongue were clipped short, or split like a magpie's. Hech! London is as bad as a hot day i' August for spoiling good flesh; for he were a good-looking lad when he went up; and now, look at him, with his skin gone into lines and flourishes, just like the first page on a copy-book!"

"I think he looks a good deal better, aunt, for

them new-fashioned whiskers!" said Bessy, blushing still at the remembrance of the kiss he had given her on first seeing her—a pledge, she thought, poor girl, that, in spite of his long silence in letter-writing, he still looked upon her as his troth-plight wife. There were things about him which none of them liked, although they never spoke of them, yet there was also something to gratify them in the way in which he remained quiet at Nab-end, instead of seeking variety, as he had formerly done, by constantly stealing off to the neighbouring town. His father had paid all the debts that he knew of, soon after Benjamin had gone up to London; so there were no duns that his parents knew of to alarm him, and keep him at home. And he went out in the morning with the old man, his father, and lounged by his side, as Nathan went round his fields, with busy yet infirm gait, having heart, as he would have expressed it, in all that was going on, because at length his son seemed to take an interest in the farming affairs, and stood patiently by his side, while he compared his own small gallows with the great short-horns looming over his neighbour's hedge.

"It's a slovenly way, thou seest, that of selling th' milk; folk don't care whether it's good or not, so that they get their pint-measure full of stuff that's watered afore it leaves th' beast, instead o' honest cheating by

the help o' th' pump. But look at Bessy's butter, what skill it shows! part her own manner o' making, and part good choice o' cattle. It's a pleasure to see her basket, a' packed ready for to go to market; and it's noan o' a pleasure for to see the buckets fu' of their blue starch-water as yon beasts give. I'm thinking they crossed th' breed wi' a pump not long sin'. Hech! but our Bessy's a cleaver canny wench! I sometimes think thou'lt be for gie'ing up th' law, and taking to th' oud trade, when thou wedst wi' her!" This was intended to be a skilful way of ascertaining whether there was any ground for the old farmer's wish and prayer that Benjamin might give up the law, and return to the primitive occupation of his father. Nathan dared to hope it now, since his son had never made much by his profession, owing, as he had said, to his want of a connexion: and the farm, and the stock, and the clean wife, too, were ready to his hand; and Nathan could safely rely on himself never in his most unguarded moments to reproach his son with the hardly-earned hundreds that had been spent on his education. So the old man listened with painful interest to the answer which his son was evidently struggling to make; coughing a little, and blowing his nose before he spoke.

"Well! you see, father, law is a precarious liveli-

hood ; a man, as I may express myself, has no chance in the profession unless he is known—known to the judges, and tiptop barristers, and that sort of thing. Now, you see, my mother and you have no acquaintance that you may call exactly in that line. But luckily I have met with a man, a friend, as I may say, who is really a first-rate fellow, knowing everybody, from the Lord Chancellor downwards ; and he has offered me a share in his business—a partnership in short——” He hesitated a little.

“I’m sure that’s uncommon kind of the gentleman,” said Nathan. “I should like for to thank him mysen ; for it’s not many as would pick up a young chap out o’ th’ dirt as it were, and say, ‘Here’s hauf my good fortune for you, sir, and your very good health.’ Most on ’em, when they’re gettin’ a bit o’ luck, run off wi’ it to keep it a’ to themselves, and gobble it down in a corner. What may be his name, for I should like to know it?”

“You don’t quite apprehend me, father. A great deal of what you’ve said is true to the letter. People don’t like to share their good luck, as you say.”

“The more credit to them as does,” broke in Nathan.

“Ay, but, you see, even such a fine fellow as my friend Cavendish does not like to give away half his

good practice for nothing. He expects an equivalent."

"An equivalent," said Nathan: his voice had dropped down an octave. "And what may that be? There's always some meaning in grand words, I take it, though I'm not book-larned enough to find it out."

"Why, in this case the equivalent he demands for taking me into partnership, and afterwards relinquishing the whole business to me, is three hundred pounds down."

Benjamin looked sideways from under his eyes to see how his father took the proposition. His father struck his stick deep down in the ground, and leaning one hand upon it, faced round at him.

"Then thy fine friend may go and be hanged. Three hunder pound! I'll be darned an' danged too, if I know where to get 'em, if I'd be making a fool o' thee an' mysen too."

He was out of breath by this time. His son took his father's first words in dogged silence; it was but the burst of surprise he had led himself to expect, and did not daunt him for long.

"I should think, sir——"

"'Sir'—whatten for dost thou 'sir' me? Is them your manners? I'm plain Nathan Huntroyd, who never took on to be a gentleman; but I have

paid my way up to this time, which I shannot do much longer, if I'm to have a son coming an' asking me for three hunder pound, just meet same as if I were a cow, and had nothing to do but let down my milk to the first person as strokes me."

"Well, father," said Benjamin, with an affectation of frankness, "then there's nothing for me, but to do as I have often planned before ; go and emigrate."

"And *what*?" said his father, looking sharply and steadily at him.

"Emigrate. Go to America, or India, or some colony where there would be an opening for a young man of spirit."

Benjamin had reserved this proposition for his trump card, expecting by means of it to carry all before him. But, to his surprise, his father plucked his stick out of the hole he had made when he so vehemently thrust it into the ground, and walked on four or five steps in advance ; there he stood still again, and there was a dead silence for a few minutes.

"It 'ud, may-be, be th' best thing thou couldst do," the father began. Benjamin set his teeth hard to keep in curses. It was well for poor Nathan he did not look round then, and see the look his son gave him. "But it would come hard like upon us, upon Hester and me, for, whether thou'rt a good 'un or not, thou'rt

our flesh and blood, our only bairn, and if thou'rt not all as a man could wish, it's, may-be, been the fault on our pride i' thee.—It 'ud kill the missus if he went off to Amerikay, and Bess, too, the lass as thinks so much on him!" The speech, originally addressed to his son, had wandered off into a monologue—as keenly listened to by Benjamin, however, as if it had all been spoken to him. After a pause of consideration, his father turned round: "Yon man—I wunnot call him a friend o' yourn, to think of asking you for such a mint o' money—is not th' only one, I'll be bound, as could give ye a start i' the law? Other folks 'ud, may-be, do it for less?"

"Not one of 'em; to give me equal advantages," said Benjamin, thinking he perceived signs of relenting.

"Well, then, thou mayst tell him, that it's nother he nor thee as 'll see th' sight o' three hunder pound o' my money. I'll not deny as I've a bit laid up again a rainy day; it's not so much as thatten though, and a part on it is for Bessy, as has been like a daughter to us."

"But Bessy is to be your real daughter some day, when I've a home to take her to," said Benjamin; for he played very fast and loose, even in his own mind, with his engagement with Bessy. Present with her, when she was looking her brightest and best, he

behaved to her as if they were engaged lovers : absent from her, he looked upon her rather as a good wedge, to be driven into his parent's favour on his behalf. Now, however, he was not exactly untrue in speaking as if he meant to make her his wife ; for the thought was in his mind, though he made use of it to work upon his father.

"It will be a dree day for us, then," said the old man. "But God'll have us in his keeping, and I'll may-happen be taking more care on us i' heaven by that time than Bess, good lass as she is, has had on us at Nab-end. Her heart is set on thee, too. But, lad, I hanna gotten the three hunder ; I keeps my cash i' th' stocking, thou knowst, till it reaches fifty pound, and then I takes it to Ripon Bank. Now the last scratch they'n gi'en me, made it just two hunder, and I hanna but on to fifteen pound yet i' the stockin', and I meant one hunder an' the red cow's calf to be for Bess, she's ta'en such pleasure like i' rearing it."

Benjamin gave a sharp glance at his father to see if he was telling the truth ; and, that a suspicion of the old man, his father, had entered into the son's head, tells enough of his own character.

"I canna do it—I canna do it, for sure—although I shall like to think as I had helped on the wedding. There's the black heifer to be sold yet, and she'll

fetch a matter of ten pound ; but a deal on't will be needed for seed-corn, for the arable did but bad last year, and I thought I would try—I'll tell thee what, lad ! I'll make it as though Bess lent thee her hunder, only thou must give her a writ of hand for it, and thou shalt have a' the money i' Ripon Bank, and see if the lawyer wunnot let thee have a share of what he offered thee at three hunder, for two. I dunnot mean for to wrong him, but thou must get a fair share for the money. At times I think thou'rt done by folk ; now, I wadna have you cheat a bairn of a brass farthing ; same time I wadna have thee so soft as to be cheated."

To explain this, it should be told that some of the bills which Benjamin had received money from his father to pay, had been altered so as to cover other and less creditable expenses which the young man had incurred ; and the simple old farmer, who had still much faith left in him for his boy, was acute enough to perceive that he had paid above the usual price for the articles he had purchased.

After some hesitation, Benjamin agreed to receive this two hundred, and promised to employ it to the best advantage in setting himself up in business. He had, nevertheless, a strange hankering after the additional fifteen pounds that was left to accumulate in the

stocking. It was his, he thought, as heir to his father ; and he soon lost some of his usual complaisance for Bessy that evening, as he dwelt on the idea that there was money being laid by for her, and grudged it to her even in imagination. He thought more of this fifteen pounds that he was not to have, than of all the hardly-earned and humbly-saved two hundred that he was to come into possession of. Meanwhile Nathan was in unusual spirits that evening. He was so generous and affectionate at heart, that he had an unconscious satisfaction in having helped two people on the road to happiness by the sacrifice of the greater part of his property. The very fact of having trusted his son so largely, seemed to make Benjamin more worthy of trust in his father's estimation. The sole idea he tried to banish was, that, if all came to pass as he hoped, both Benjamin and Bessy would be settled far away from Nab-end ; but then he had a child-like reliance that "God would take care of him and his missus, somehow or anodder. It wur o' no use looking too far ahead."

Bessy had to hear many unintelligible jokes from her uncle that night ; for he made no doubt that Benjamin had told her all that had passed, whereas the truth was, his son had said never a word to his cousin on the subject.

When the old couple were in bed, Nathan told his wife of the promise he had made to his son, and the plan in life which the advance of the two hundred was to promote. Poor Hester was a little startled at the sudden change in the destination of the sum, which she had long thought of with secret pride as "money i' th' bank." But she was willing enough to part with it, if necessary, for Benjamin. Only, how such a sum could be necessary, was the puzzle. But even this perplexity was jostled out of her mind by the overwhelming idea, not only of "our Ben" settling in London, but of Bessy going there too as his wife. This great trouble swallowed up all care about money, and Hester shivered and sighed all the night through with distress. In the morning, as Bessy was kneading the bread, her aunt, who had been sitting by the fire in an unusual manner, for one of her active habits, said :

"I reckon we maun go to th' shop for our bread, an' that's a thing I never thought to come to so long as I lived."

Bessy looked up from her kneading, surprised :

"I'm sure, I'm noan going to eat their nasty stuff. What for do ye want to get baker's bread, aunt? This dough will rise as high as a kite in a south wind."

"I'm not up to kneading as I could do once ; it welly breaks my back ; and when thou'rt off in London, I reckon we maun buy our bread, first time in my life."

"I'm not a-going to London," said Bessy, kneading away with fresh resolution, and growing very red, either with the idea or the exertion.

"But our Ben is going partner wi' a great London lawyer, and thou know'st he'll not tarry long but what he'll fetch thee."

"Now, aunt," said Bessy, stripping her arms of the dough, but still not looking up, "if that's all, don't fret yourself. Ben will have twenty minds in his head afore he settles, eyther in business or in wedlock. I sometimes wonder," she said, with increasing vehemence, "why I go on thinking on him ; for I dunnot think he thinks on me, when I'm out o' sight. I've a month's mind to try and forget him this time when he leaves us—that I have !"

"For shame, wench ! and he to be planning and purposing all for thy sake. It wur only yesterday as he wur talking to thy uncle, and mapping it out so clever ; only thou seest, wench, it'll be dree work for us when both thee and him is gone."

The old woman began to cry the kind of tearless cry of the aged. Bessy hastened to comfort her ; and

the two talked, and grieved, and hoped, and planned for the days that now were to be, till they ended, the one in being consoled, the other in being secretly happy.

Nathan and his son came back from Highminster that evening, with their business transacted in the roundabout way, which was most satisfactory to the old man. If he had thought it necessary to take half as much pains in ascertaining the truth of the plausible details by which his son bore out the story of the offered partnership, as he did in trying to get his money conveyed to London in the most secure manner, it would have been well for him. But he knew nothing of all this, and acted in the way which satisfied his anxiety best. He came home tired, but content; not in such high spirits as on the night before, but as easy in his mind as he could be on the eve of his son's departure. Bessy, pleasantly agitated by her aunt's tale of the morning of her cousin's true love for her—what ardently we wish we long believe—and the plan which was to end in their marriage—end to her, the woman, at least—Bessy looked almost pretty in her bright, blushing comeliness, and more than once, as she moved about from kitchen to dairy, Benjamin pulled her towards him, and gave her a kiss. To all such proceedings the old couple were wilfully

blind ; and, as night drew on, every one became sadder and quieter, thinking of the parting that was to be on the morrow. As the hours slipped away, Bessy, too, became subdued ; and, by-and-by, her simple cunning was exerted to get Benjamin to sit down next his mother, whose very heart was yearning after him, as Bessy saw. When once her child was placed by her side, and she had got possession of his hand, the old woman kept stroking it, and murmuring long unused words of endearment, such as she had spoken to him while he was yet a little child. But all this was wearisome to him. As long as he might play with, and plague, and caress Bessy, he had not been sleepy ; but now he yawned loudly. Bessy could have boxed his ears for not curbing this gaping ; at any rate, he need not have done it so openly—so almost ostentatiously. His mother was more pitiful.

“Thou’rt tired, my lad !” said she, putting her hand fondly on his shoulder ; but it fell off, as he stood up suddenly, and said :

“Yes, deuced tired ! I’m off to bed.” And with a rough careless kiss all round, even to Bessy, as if he was “deuced tired” of playing the lover, he was gone ; leaving the three to gather up their thoughts slowly, and follow him up stairs.

He seemed almost impatient at them for rising

betimes to see him off the next morning, and made no more of a good-bye than some such speech as this :
“ Well, good folk, when next I see you, I hope you’ll have merrier faces than you have to-day. Why, you might be going to a funeral ; it’s enough to scare a man from the place ; you look quite ugly to what you did last night, Bess.”

He was gone ; and they turned into the house, and settled to the long day’s work without many words about their loss. They had no time for unnecessary talking, indeed, for much had been left undone, during his short visit, that ought to have been done ; and they had now to work double tides. Hard work was their comfort for many a long day.

For some time, Benjamin’s letters, if not frequent, were full of exultant accounts of his well-doing. It is true that the details of his prosperity were somewhat vague ; but the fact was broadly and unmistakably stated. Then came longer pauses ; shorter letters, altered in tone. About a year after he had left them, Nathan received a letter, which bewildered and irritated him exceedingly. Something had gone wrong—what, Benjamin did not say—but the letter ended with a request that was almost a demand, for the remainder of his father’s savings, whether in the stocking or the bank. Now, the year had not been prosperous with,

Nathan ; there had been an epidemic among cattle, and he had suffered along with his neighbours ; and, moreover, the price of cows, when he had bought some to repair his wasted stock, was higher than he had ever remembered it before. The fifteen pounds in the stocking, which Benjamin left, had diminished to little more than three ; and to have that required of him in so peremptory a manner ! Before Nathan imparted the contents of this letter to any one (Bessy and her aunt had gone to market on a neighbour's cart that day), he got pen and ink and paper, and wrote back an ill-spelt, but very implicit and stern negative. Benjamin had had his portion ; and if he could not make it do, so much the worse for him ; his father had no more to give him. That was the substance of the letter.

The letter was written, directed, and sealed, and given to the country postman, returning to Highminster after his day's distribution and collection of letters, before Hester and Bessy came back from market. It had been a pleasant day of neighbourly meeting and sociable gossip : prices had been high, and they were in good spirits, only agreeably tired, and full of small pieces of news. It was some time before they found out how flatly all their talk fell on the ears of the stay-at-home listener. But, when they saw that

his depression was caused by something beyond their powers of accounting for by any little every-day cause, they urged him to tell them what was the matter. His anger had not gone off. It had rather increased by dwelling upon it, and he spoke it out in good resolute terms; and, long ere he had ended, the two women were as sad, if not as angry, as himself. Indeed, it was many days before either feeling wore away in the minds of those who entertained them. Bessy was the soonest comforted, because she found a vent for her sorrow in action; action that was half as a kind of compensation for many a sharp word that she had spoken, when her cousin had done anything to displease her on his last visit, and half because she believed that he never could have written such a letter to his father, unless his want of money had been very pressing and real; though how he could ever have wanted money so soon, after such a heap of it had been given to him, was more than she could justly say. Bessy got out all her savings of little presents of sixpences and shillings, ever since she had been a child,—of all the money she had gained for the eggs of two hens, called her own; she put the whole together, and it was above two pounds—two pounds five and sevenpence, to speak accurately—and, leaving out the penny as a nest-egg for her future savings, she made

up the rest in a little parcel, and sent it, with a note, to Benjamin's address in London :

“ From a well-wisher.

“ D^r. BENJAMIN,—Unkle has lost 2 cows and a vast of monney. He is a good deal Angored, but more Troubled. So no more at present. Hopeing this will finding you well As it leaves us. Tho' lost to Site, To Memory Dear. Repayment not kneeded.

“ Your effectonet cousin,

“ ELIZABETH ROSE.”

When this packet was once fairly sent off, Bessy began to sing again over her work. She never expected the mere form of acknowledgment ; indeed, she had such faith in the carrier (who took parcels to York, whence they were forwarded to London by coach), that she felt sure he would go on purpose to London to deliver anything intrusted to him, if he had not full confidence in the person, persons, coach and horses, to whom he committed it. Therefore she was not anxious that she did not hear of its arrival. “ Giving a thing to a man as one knows,” said she to herself, “ is a vast different to poking a thing through a hole into a box, th' inside of which one has never clapped eyes on ; and yet letters get safe some ways

or another." (This belief in the infallibility of the post was destined to a shock before long.) But she had a secret yearning for Benjamin's thanks, and some of the old words of love that she had been without so long. Nay, she even thought—when, day after day, week after week, passed by without a line—that he might be winding up his affairs in that weary, wasteful London, and coming back to Nab-end to thank her in person.

One day—her aunt was up stairs, inspecting the summer's make of cheeses, her uncle out in the fields—the postman brought a letter into the kitchen to Bessy. A country postman, even now, is not much pressed for time, and in those days there were but few letters to distribute, and they were only sent out from Highminster once a week into the district in which Nab-end was situated; and on those occasions, the letter-carrier usually paid morning calls on the various people for whom he had letters. So, half standing by the dresser, half sitting on it, he began to rummage out his bag. "It's a queer-like thing I've got for Nathan this time. I am afraid it will bear ill news in it, for there's 'Dead Letter Office' stamped on the top of it."

"Lord save us!" said Bessy, and sat down on the nearest chair, as white as a sheet. In an instant, how-

ever, she was up, and, snatching the ominous letter out of the man's hands, she pushed him before her out of the house, and said, "Be off wi' thee, afore aunt comes down;" and ran past him as hard as she could, till she reached the field where she expected to find her uncle.


"Uncle," said she, breathless, "what is it? Oh, uncle, speak! Is he dead?"

Nathan's hands trembled, and his eyes dazzled. "Take it," he said, "and tell me what it is."

"It's a letter—it's from you to Benjamin, it is—and there's words written on it, 'Not known at the address given;' so they've sent it back to the writer—that's you, uncle. Oh, it gave me such a start, with them nasty words written outside!"

Nathan had taken the letter back into his own hands, and was turning it over, while he strove to understand what the quick-witted Bessy had picked up at a glance. But he arrived at a different conclusion.

"He's dead!" said he. "The lad is dead, and he never knowed how as I were sorry I wrote to 'un so sharp. My lad! my lad!" Nathan sat down on the ground where he stood, and covered his face with his old, withered hands. The letter returned to him was one which he had written, with infinite pains and at



various times, to tell his child, in kinder words and at greater length than he had done before, the reasons why he could not send him the money demanded. And now Benjamin was dead ; nay, the old man immediately jumped to the conclusion that his child had been starved to death, without money, in a wild, wide, strange place. All he could say at first was :

“ My heart, Bess—my heart is broken !” And he put his hand to his side, still keeping his shut eyes covered with the other, as though he never wished to see the light of day again. Bessy was down by his side in an instant, holding him in her arms, chafing and kissing him.

“ It’s noan so bad, uncle ; he’s not dead ; the letter does not say that, dunnot think it. He’s flitted from that lodging, and the lazy tykes dunna know where to find him ; and so, they just send y’ back th’ letter, instead of trying fra’ house to house, as Mark Benson would. I’ve always heerd tell on south country folk for laziness. He’s noan dead, uncle ; he’s just flitted, and he’ll let us know afore long where he’s gotten to. May-be it’s a cheaper place, for that lawyer has cheated him, ye reck’let, and he’ll be trying to live for as little as he can, that’s all, uncle. Dunnot take on so, for it doesna say he’s dead.”

By this time, Bessy was crying with agitation, al-

though she firmly believed in her own view of the case, and had felt the opening of the ill-favoured letter as a great relief. Presently she began to urge, both with word and action upon her uncle, that he should sit no longer on the damp grass. She pulled him up, for he was very stiff, and, as he said, "all shaken to dithers." She made him walk about, repeating over and over again her solution of the case, always in the same words, beginning again and again, "He's noan dead ; it's just been a flitting," and so on. Nathan shook his head, and tried to be convinced ; but it was a steady belief in his own heart for all that. He looked so deathly ill on his return home with Bessy (for she would not let him go on with his day's work), that his wife made sure he had taken cold, and he, weary and indifferent to life, was glad to subside into bed and the rest from exertion which his real bodily illness gave him. Neither Bessy nor he spoke of the letter again, even to each other, for many days ; and she found means to stop Mark Benson's tongue, and satisfy his kindly curiosity, by giving him the rosy side of her own view of the case.

Nathan got up again, an older man in looks and constitution by ten years for that week of bed. His wife gave him many a scolding on his imprudence for sitting down in the wet field, if ever so tired. But

now she, too, was beginning to be uneasy at Benjamin's long-continued silence. She could not write herself, but she urged her husband many a time to send a letter to ask for news of her lad. He said nothing in reply for some time : at length, he told her he would write next Sunday afternoon. Sunday was his general day for writing, and this Sunday he meant to go to church for the first time since his illness. On Saturday he was very persistent against his wife's wishes (backed by Bessy as hard as she could), in resolving to go into Highminster to market. The change would do him good, he said. But he came home tired, and a little mysterious in his ways. When he went to the shippon the last thing at night, he asked Bessy to go with him, and hold the lantern, while he looked at an ailing cow ; and, when they were fairly out of the earshot of the house, he pulled a little shop-parcel from his pocket and said :

“Thou'lt put that on ma Sunday hat, wilt'ou, lass ? It'll be a bit on a comfort to me ; for I know my lad's dead and gone, though I dunna speak on it, for fear o' grieving th' old woman and ye.”

“I'll put it on, uncle, if——But he's noan dead.”
(Bessy was sobbing.)

“I know—I know, lass. I dunnot wish other folk to hold my opinion ; but I'd like to wear a bit o' crape,

out o' respect to my boy. It 'ud have done me good for to have ordered a black coat, but she'd see if I had na' on my wedding-coat, Sundays, for a' she's losing her eyesight, poor old wench! But she'll ne'er take notice o' a bit o' crape. Thou'lt put it on all canny and tidy."

So Nathan went to church with a strip of crape, as narrow as Bessy durst venture to make it, round his hat. Such is the contradictoriness of human nature, that, though he was most anxious his wife should not hear of his conviction that their son was dead, he was half hurt that none of his neighbours noticed his sign of mourning so far as to ask him for whom he wore it.

But after a while, when they never heard a word from or about Benjamin, the household wonder as to what had become of him grew so painful and strong, that Nathan no longer kept his idea to himself. Poor Hester, however, rejected it with her whole will, heart, and soul. She could not and would not believe—nothing should make her believe—that her only child Benjamin had died without some sign of love or farewell to her. No arguments could shake her in this. She believed that, if all natural means of communication between her and him had been cut off at the last supreme moment—if death had come upon him in an

instant, sudden and unexpected—her intense love would have been supernaturally made conscious of the blank. Nathan at times tried to feel glad that she could still hope to see the lad again; but at other moments he wanted her sympathy in his grief, his self-reproach, his weary wonder as to how and what they had done wrong in the treatment of their son, that he had been such a care and sorrow to his parents. Bessy was convinced, first by her aunt, and then by her uncle—honestly convinced—on both sides of the argument; and so, for the time, able to sympathise with each. But she lost her youth in a very few months; she looked set and middle-aged long before she ought to have done; and rarely smiled and never sang again.

All sorts of new arrangements were required, by the blow which told so miserably upon the energies of all the household at Nab-end. Nathan could no longer go about and direct his two men, taking a good turn of work himself at busy times. Hester lost her interest in her dairy; for which, indeed, her increasing loss of sight unfitted her. Bessy would either do field work, or attend to the cows and the shippin, or churn, or make cheese; she did all well, no longer merrily, but with something of stern cleverness. But she was not sorry when her uncle, one evening, told her aunt

and her that a neighbouring farmer, Job Kirkby, had made him an offer to take so much of his land off his hands as would leave him only pasture enough for two cows, and no arable to attend to; while Farmer Kirkby did not wish to interfere with anything in the house, only would be glad to use some of the out-buildings for his fattening cattle.

“We can do wi’ Hawky and Daisy; it’ll leave us eight or ten pound o’ butter to take to market i’ summer time, and keep us fra’ thinking too much, which is what I’m dreading on as I get into years.”

“Ay,” said his wife. “Thou’ll not have to go so far afield, if it’s only the Aster-Toft as is on thy hands. And Bess will have to gie up her pride i’ cheese, and tak’ to making cream-butter. I’d allays a fancy for trying at cream-butter, but th’ whey had to be used; else, where I come fra’, they’d never ha’ looked near whey-butter.”

When Hester was left alone with Bessy, she said, in allusion to this change of plan:—

“I’m thankful to the Lord that it is as it is: for I were allays feared Nathan would have to gie up the house and farm altogether, and then the lad would na’ know where to find us when he came back fra’ Merikay. He’s gone there for to make his fortune, I’ll be bound. Keep up thy heart, lass, he’ll be home some day; and

have sown his wild oats. Eh ! but thatten's a pretty story i' the Gospels about the Prodigal, who'd to eat the pigs' vittle at one time, but ended i' clover in his father's house. And I'm sure our Nathan 'll be ready to forgive him, and love him, and make much of him, may-be a deal more nor me, who never gave in to's death. It 'll be liken to a resurrection to our Nathan."

Farmer Kirkby, then, took by far the greater part of the land belonging to Nab-end Farm ; and the work about the rest, and about the two remaining cows, was easily done by three pairs of willing hands, with a little occasional assistance. The Kirkby family were pleasant enough to have to deal with. There was a son, a stiff, grave bachelor, who was very particular and methodical about his work, and rarely spoke to any one. But Nathan took it into his head that John Kirkby was looking after Bessy, and was a good deal troubled in his mind in consequence ; for it was the first time he had to face the effects of his belief in his son's death ; and he discovered, to his own surprise, that he had not that implicit faith, which would make it easy for him to look upon Bessy as the wife of another man, than the one to whom she had been betrothed in her youth. As, however, John Kirkby seemed in no hurry to make his intentions (if indeed

he had any) clear to Bessy, it was only now and then that this jealousy on behalf of his lost son seized upon Nathan.

But people, old, and in deep hopeless sorrow, grow irritable at times, however they may repent and struggle against their irritability. There were days when Bessy had to bear a good deal from her uncle; but she loved him so dearly and respected him so much, that, high as her temper was to all other people, she never returned him a rough or impatient word. And she had a reward in the conviction of his deep, true affection for her, and her aunt's entire and most sweet dependence upon her.

One day, however—it was near the end of November—Bessy had had a good deal to bear, that seemed more than usually unreasonable, on behalf of her uncle. The truth was, that one of Kirkby's cows was ill, and John Kirkby was a good deal about in the farm-yard; Bessy was interested about the animal, and had helped in preparing a mash over their own fire, that had to be given warm to the sick creature. If John had been out of the way, there would have been no one more anxious about the affair than Nathan; both because he was naturally kind-hearted and neighbourly, and also because he was rather proud of his reputation for knowledge in the diseases of cattle. But because

John was about, and Bessy helping a little in what had to be done, Nathan would do nothing, and chose to assume that "nothing to think on ailed th' beast, but lads and lasses were allays fain to be feared on something." Now John was upwards of forty, and Bessy nearly eight-and-twenty, so the terms lads and lasses did not exactly apply to their case.

When Bessy brought the milk in from their own cows, towards half-past five o'clock, Nathan bade her make the doors, and not be running out i' the dark and cold about other folk's business; and, though Bessy was a little surprised and a good deal annoyed at his tone, she sat down to her supper without making a remonstrance. It had long been Nathan's custom to look out the last thing at night, to see "what mak' o' weather it wur;" and when, towards half-past eight, he got his stick and went out—two or three steps from the door, which opened into the house-place where they were sitting—Hester put her hand on her niece's shoulder and said:

"He's gotten a touch o' the rheumatics, as twinges him and makes him speak so sharp. I didna like to ask thee afore him, but how's yon poor beast?"

"Very ailing, belike. John Kirkby wur off for th' cow-doctor when I cam in. I reckon they'll have to stop up wi't a' night."

Since their sorrows, her uncle had taken to reading a chapter in the Bible aloud, the last thing at night. He could not read fluently, and often hesitated long over a word, which he miscalled at length ; but the very fact of opening the book seemed to soothe those old bereaved parents ; for it made them feel quiet and safe in the presence of God, and took them out of the cares and troubles of this world into that futurity which, however dim and vague, was to their faithful hearts as a sure and certain rest. This little quiet time—Nathan sitting with his horn spectacles ; the tallow candle between him and the Bible, and throwing a strong light on his reverent, earnest face ; Hester sitting on the other side of the fire, her head bowed in attentive listening, now and then shaking it, and moaning a little, but when a promise came, or any good tidings of great joy, saying “Amen” with fervour ; Bessy by her aunt, perhaps her mind a little wandering to some household cares, or it might be on thoughts of those who were absent—this little quiet pause, I say, was grateful and soothing to this household, as a lullaby to a tired child. But this night, Bessy—sitting opposite to the long low window, only shaded by a few geraniums that grew in the sill, and to the door alongside that window, through which her uncle had passed not a quarter of an hour before—saw the

wooden latch of the door gently and almost noiselessly lifted up, as if some one were trying it from the outside.

She was startled ; and watched again, intently ; but it was perfectly still now. She thought it must have been that it had not fallen into its proper place, when her uncle had come in and locked the door. It was just enough to make her uncomfortable, no more ; and she almost persuaded herself it must have been fancy. Before going up stairs, however, she went to the window to look out into the darkness ; but all was still. Nothing to be seen ; nothing to be heard. So the three went quietly up stairs to bed.

The house was little better than a cottage. The front door opened on a house-place, over which was the old couple's bedroom. To the left, as you entered this pleasant houseplace, and at close right angles with the entrance, was a door that led into the small parlour, which was Hester's and Bessy's pride, although not half as comfortable as the house-place, and never on any occasion used as a sitting-room. There were shells and bunches of honesty in the fireplace ; the best chest of drawers, and a company-set of gaudy-coloured china, and a bright common carpet on the floor ; but all failed to give it the aspect of the homely comfort and delicate cleanliness of the house-place. Over this

parlour was the bedroom which Benjamin had slept in when a boy—when at home. It was kept still in a kind of readiness for him. The bed was yet there, in which none had slept since he had last done, eight or nine years ago; and every now and then, the warming-pan was taken quietly and silently up by his old mother, and the bed thoroughly aired. But this she did in her husband's absence, and without saying a word to any one; nor did Bessy offer to help her, though her eyes often filled with tears, as she saw her aunt still going through the hopeless service. But the room had become a receptacle for all unused things; and there was always a corner of it appropriated to the winter's store of apples. To the left of the house-place, as you stood facing the fire, on the side opposite to the window and outer door, were two other doors; the one on the right led into a kind of back kitchen, and had a lean-to roof, and a door opening on to the farm-yard and back premises; the left-hand door gave on the stairs, underneath which was a closet, in which various household treasures were kept, and beyond that the dairy, over which Bessy slept; her little chamber window opening just above the sloping roof of the back kitchen. There were neither blinds nor shutters to any of the windows, either up stairs or down; the house was built of stone, and there was heavy framework of

the same material round the little casement windows, and the long, low window of the houseplace was divided by what, in grander dwellings, would be called mullions.

By nine o'clock this night of which I am speaking, all had gone up stairs to bed : it was even later than usual, for the burning of candles was regarded so much in the light of an extravagance, that the household kept early hours even for country-folk. But, somehow, this evening, Bessy could not sleep, although, in general, she was in deep slumber five minutes after her head touched the pillow. Her thoughts ran on the chances for John Kirkby's cow, and a little fear lest the disorder might be epidemic, and spread to their own cattle. Across all these homely cares came a vivid, uncomfortable recollection of the way in which the door latch went up and down, without any sufficient agency to account for it. She felt more sure now, than she had done down stairs, that it was a real movement and no effect of her imagination. She wished that it had not happened just when her uncle was reading, that she might at once have gone quick to the door, and convinced herself of the cause. As it was, her thoughts ran uneasily on the supernatural ; and thence to Benjamin, her dear cousin and play-fellow, her early lover. She had long given him up

as lost for ever to her, if not actually dead ; but this very giving him up for ever involved a free, full forgiveness of all his wrongs to her. She thought tenderly of him, as of one who might have been led astray in his later years, but who existed rather in her recollection as the innocent child, the spirited lad, the handsome, dashing young man. If John Kirkby's quiet attentions had ever betrayed his wishes to Beasy—if indeed he ever had any wishes on the subject—her first feeling would have been to compare his weather-beaten, middle-aged face and figure with the face and figure she remembered well, but never more expected to see in this life. So thinking, she became very restless, and weary of bed, and, after long tossing and turning, ending in a belief that she should never get to sleep at all that night, she went off soundly and suddenly.

As suddenly was she wide awake, sitting up in bed, listening to some noise that must have awakened her, but which was not repeated for some time. Surely it was in her uncle's room—her uncle was up ; but, for a minute or two, there was no further sound. Then she heard him open his door, and go down stairs, with hurried, stumbling steps. She now thought that her aunt must be ill, and hastily sprang out of bed, and was putting on her petticoat with hurried, trembling hands, and had just opened her chamber door, when

she heard the front door undone, and a scuffle, as of the feet of several people, and many rude, passionate words, spoken hoarsely below the breath. Quick as thought she understood it all—the house was lonely—her uncle had the reputation of being well-to-do—they had pretended to be belated, and had asked their way or something. What a blessing that John Kirkby's cow was sick, for there were several men watching with him! She went back, opened her window, squeezed herself out, slid down the lean-to roof, and ran bare-foot and breathless, to the shippon :

“John, John, for the love of God, come quick; there's robbers in the house, and uncle and aunt 'll be murdered!” she whispered, in terrified accents, through the closed and barred shippon door. In a moment it was undone, and John and the cow-doctor stood there, ready to act, if they but understood her rightly. Again she repeated her words, with broken, half-unintelligible explanations of what she as yet did not rightly understand.

“Front door is open, say'st thou?” said John, arming himself with a pitchfork, while the cow-doctor took some other implement. “Then I reckon we'd best make for that way o' getting into th' house, and catch 'em all in a trap.”

“Run! run!” was all Bessy could say, taking hold

of John Kirkby's arm, and pulling him along with her. Swiftly did the three run to the house, round the corner, and in at the open front door. The men carried the horn lantern they had been using in the shippon, and, by the sudden oblong light that it threw, Bessy saw the principal object of her anxiety, her uncle, lying stunned and helpless on the kitchen floor. Her first thought was for him; for she had no idea that her aunt was in any immediate danger, although she heard the noise of feet, and fierce subdued voices up stairs.

"Make th' door behind us, lass. We'll not let 'em escape!" said brave John Kirkby, dauntless in a good cause, though he knew not how many there might be above. The cow-doctor fastened and locked the door, saying, "There!" in a defiant tone, as he put the key in his pocket. It was to be a struggle for life or death, or, at any rate, for effectual capture or desperate escape. Bessy kneeled down by her uncle, who did not speak nor give any sign of consciousness. Bessy raised his head by drawing a pillow off the settle and putting it under him; she longed to go for water into the back kitchen, but the sound of a violent struggle, and of heavy blows, and of low, hard curses spoken through closed teeth, and muttered passion, as though breath were too much

needed for action to be wasted in speech, kept her still and quiet by her uncle's side in the kitchen, where the darkness might almost be felt, so thick and deep was it. Once—in a pause of her own heart's beating—a sudden terror came over her; she perceived, in that strange way in which the presence of a living creature forces itself on our consciousness in the darkest room, that some one was near her, keeping as still as she. It was not the poor old man's breathing that she heard, nor the radiation of his presence that she felt; some one else was in the kitchen; another robber, perhaps, left to guard the old man, with murderous intent if his consciousness returned. Now, Bessy was fully aware that self-preservation would keep her terrible companion quiet, as there was no motive for his betraying himself stronger than the desire of escape; any effort for which he, the unseen witness, must know would be rendered abortive by the fact of the door being locked. Yet with the knowledge that he was there, close to her, still, silent as the grave,—with fearful, it might be deadly, unspoken thoughts in his heart,—possibly even with keener and stronger sight than hers, as longer accustomed to the darkness, able to discern her figure and posture, and glaring at her like some wild beast,—Bessy could not fail to shrink from the vision that her

fancy presented! And still the struggle went on up stairs; feet slipping, blows sounding, and the wrench of intentioned aims, the strong gasps for breath, as the wrestlers paused for an instant. In one of these pauses, Bessy felt conscious of a creeping movement close to her, which ceased when the noise of the strife above died away, and was resumed when it again began. She was aware of it by some subtle vibration of the air, rather than by touch or sound. She was sure that he who had been close to her one minute as she knelt, was, the next, passing stealthily towards the inner door which led to the staircase. She thought he was going to join and strengthen his accomplices, and, with a great cry, she sprang after him; but, just as she came to the doorway, through which some dim portion of light from the upper chambers came, she saw one man thrown down stairs with such violence that he fell almost at her very feet, while the dark, creeping figure glided suddenly away to the left, and as suddenly entered the closet beneath the stairs. Bessy had no time to wonder as to his purpose in so doing, whether he had at first designed to aid his accomplices in their desperate fight or not. He was an enemy, a robber, that was all she knew, and she sprang to the door of the closet, and in a trice had locked it on the outside. And then she stood frightened, pant-

ing in that dark corner, sick with terror lest the man who lay before her was either John Kirkby or the cow-doctor. If it were either of those friendly two, what would become of the other—of her uncle, her aunt, herself? But, in a very few minutes, this wonder was ended; her two defenders came slowly and heavily down the stairs, dragging with them a man, fierce, sullen, despairing—disabled with terrible blows, which had made his face one bloody, swollen mass. As for that, neither John nor the cow-doctor were much more presentable. One of them bore the lantern in his teeth, for all their strength was taken up by the weight of the fellow they were bearing.

“Take care,” said Bessy, from her corner; “there’s a chap just beneath your feet. I dunno know if he’s dead or alive, and uncle lies on the floor just beyond.”

They stood still on the stairs for a moment. Just then the robber they had thrown down stairs stirred and moaned.

“Bessy,” said John, “run off to th’ stable and fetch ropes and gearing for to bind ’em, and we’ll rid the house on ’em, and thou can’st go see after th’ oud folks, who need it sadly.”

Bessy was back in a very few minutes. When she came in, there was more light in the house-place, for some one had stirred up the raked fire.

"That felly makes as though his leg were broken," said John, nodding towards the man still lying on the ground. Bessy felt almost sorry for him as they handled him—not over gently—and bound him, only half-conscious, as hardly and tightly as they had done his fierce, surly companion. She even felt so sorry for his evident agony, as they turned him over and over, that she ran to get him a cup of water to moisten his lips.

"I'm loth to leave yo' with him alone," said John, "though I'm thinking his leg is broken for sartain, and he can't stir, even if he comes to hissel, to do yo' any harm. But we'll just take off this chap, and mak sure of him, and then one on us 'll come back to yo', and we can, may-be, find a gate or so for yo' to get shut on him out o' th' house. This felly's made safe enough, I'll be bound," said he, looking at the burglar, who stood, bloody and black, with fell hatred on his sullen face. His eye caught Bessy's as hers fell on him with dread so evident that it made him smile, and the look and the smile prevented the words from being spoken which were on Bessy's lips. She dared not tell, before him, that an able-bodied accomplice still remained in the house, lest, somehow, the door which kept him a prisoner should be broken open, and the fight renewed. So she only said to John, as he was leaving the house :

"Thou'll not be long away, for I'm afeard of being left wi' this man."

"He'll noan do thee harm," said John.

"No! but I'm feared lest he should die. And there's uncle and aunt. Come back soon, John!"

"Ay, ay!" said he, half-pleased; "I'll be back, never fear me."

So Bessy shut the door after them, but did not lock it for fear of mischances in the house, and went once more to her uncle, whose breathing, by this time, was easier than when she had first returned into the house-place with John and the doctor. By the light of the fire, too, she could now see that he had received a blow on the head which was probably the occasion of his stupor. Round this wound, which was bleeding pretty freely, Bessy put cloths dipped in cold water, and then, leaving him for a time, she lighted a candle, and was about to go up stairs to her aunt, when, just as she was passing the bound and disabled robber, she heard her name softly, urgently called :

"Bessy, Bessy!" At first the voice sounded so close that she thought it must be the unconscious wretch at her feet. But once again that voice thrilled through her :

"Bessy, Bessy! for God's sake, let me out!"

She went to the stair-closet door, and tried to speak,

but could not, her heart beat so terribly: Again, close to her ear:

"Bessy, Bessy! they'll be back directly; let me out, I say! For God's sake, let me out!" And he began to kick violently against the panels.

"Hush, hush!" she said, sick with a terrible dread, yet with a will strongly resisting her conviction. "Who are you?" But she knew—knew quite well.

"Benjamin." An oath. "Let me out, I say, and I'll be off, and out of England by to-morrow night, never to come back, and you'll have all my father's money."

"D'ye think I care for that?" said Bessy, vehemently, feeling with trembling hands for the lock; "I wish there was naan such a thing as money i' the world, afore yo'd come to this. There, yo're free, and I charge yo' never to let me see your face again. I'd ne'er ha' let yo' loose but for fear o' breaking their hearts, if yo' hanna killed them already." But, before she had ended her speech, he was gone—off into the black darkness, leaving the door open wide. With a new terror in her mind, Bessy shut it afresh—shut it and bolted it this time. Then she sat down on the first chair, and relieved her soul by giving a great and exceeding bitter cry. But she knew it was no time for giving way, and, lifting herself up with as much

effort as if each of her limbs was a heavy weight, she went into the back kitchen, and took a drink of cold water. To her surprise, she heard her uncle's voice, saying feebly :

“Carry me up, and lay me by her.”

But Bessy could not carry him : she could only help his faint exertions to walk up stairs ; and, by the time he was there, sitting panting on the first chair she could find, John Kirkby and Atkinson returned. John came up now to her aid. Her aunt lay across the bed in a fainting fit, and her uncle sat in so utterly broken-down a state that Bessy feared immediate death for both. But John cheered her up, and lifted the old man into his bed again, and, while Bessy tried to compose poor Hester's limbs into a position of rest, John went down to hunt about for the little store of gin, which was always kept in a corner cupboard against emergencies.

“They've had a sore fright,” said he, shaking his head, as he poured a little gin and hot water into their mouths with a teaspoon, while Bessy chafed their cold feet ; “and it and the cold have been welly too much for 'em, poor old folk !”

He looked tenderly at them, and Bessy blessed him in her heart for that look.

“I maun be off. I sent Atkinson up to th' farm

for to bring down Bob, and Jack came wi' him back to th' shippon for to look after t'other man. He began blackguarding us all round, so Bob and Jack were gagging him wi' bridles when I left."

"Ne'er give heed to what he says," cried poor Bessy, a new panic besetting her. "Folks o' his sort are allays for dragging other folks into their mischief. I'm right glad he were well gagged."

"Well! but what I were saying were this. Atkinson and me will take t'other chap, who seems quiet enough, to th' shippon, and it 'll be one piece o' work for to mind them, and the cow; and I'll saddle old bay mare and ride for constables and doctor fra' Highminster. I'll bring Dr. Preston up to see Nathan and Hester first, and then I reckon th' broken-legged chap down below must have his turn, for all as he's met wi' his misfortunes in a wrong line o' life."

"Ay!" said Bessy. "We maun ha' the doctor sure enough, for look at them how they lie! like two stone statues on a church monument, so sad and solemn."

"There's a look o' sense come back into their faces, though, sin' they supped that gin and water. I'd keep on a-bathing his head and giving them a sup on't fra' time to time, if I was you, Bessy."

Bessy followed him down stairs, and lighted the men out of the house. She dared not light them

carrying their burden even, until they passed round the corner of the house ; so strong was her fearful conviction that Benjamin was lurking near, seeking again to enter. She rushed back into the kitchen, bolted and barred the door, and pushed the end of the dresser against it, shutting her eyes as she passed the uncurtained window, for, fear of catching a glimpse of a white face pressed against the glass, and gazing at her. The poor old couple lay quiet and speechless, although Hester's position had slightly altered : she had turned a little on her side towards her husband, and had laid one shrivelled arm around his neck. But he was just as Bessy had left him, with the wet clothes around his head, his eyes not wanting in a certain intelligence, but solemn, and unconscious to all that was passing around as the eyes of death.

His wife spoke a little from time to time—said a word of thanks, perhaps, or so ; but he, never. All the rest of that terrible night, Bessy tended the poor old couple with constant care, her own heart so stunned and bruised in its feelings that she went about her pious duties almost like one in a dream. The November morning was long in coming ; nor did she perceive any change, either for the worse or the better, before the doctor came, about eight o'clock. John Kirkby brought him ; and was full of the capture of the two burglars.

As far as Bessy could make out, the participation of that unnatural Third was unknown. It was a relief, almost sickening in the revulsion it gave her from her terrible fear, which now she felt had haunted and held possession of her all night long, and had in fact paralysed her from thinking. Now she felt and thought with acute and feverish vividness, owing no doubt, in part, to the sleepless night she had passed. She felt almost sure that her uncle (possibly her aunt too) had recognised Benjamin; but there was a faint chance that they had not done so, and wild horses should never tear the secret from her, nor should any inadvertent word betray the fact that there had been a third person concerned. As to Nathan, he had never uttered a word. It was her aunt's silence that made Bessy fear lest Hester knew, somehow, that her son was concerned.

The doctor examined them both closely; looked hard at the wound on Nathan's head; asked questions which Hester answered shortly and unwillingly, and Nathan not at all: shutting his eyes, as if even the sight of a stranger was pain to him. Bessy replied in their stead to all that she could answer respecting their state; and followed the doctor down stairs with a beating heart. When they came into the house-place, they found John had opened the outer door to let in

some fresh air, had brushed the hearth and made up the fire, and put the chairs and table in their right places. He reddened a little as Bessy's eye fell upon his swollen and battered face, but tried to smile it off in a dry kind of way :

"Yo' see, I'm an ould bachelor, and I just thought as I'd redd up things a bit. How dun yo' find 'em, doctor?"

"Well, the poor old couple have had a terrible shock. I shall send them some soothing medicine to bring down the pulse, and a lotion for the old man's head. It is very well it bled so much; there might have been a good deal of inflammation." And so he went on, giving directions to Bessy for keeping them quietly in bed through the day. From these directions she gathered that they were not, as she had feared all night long, near to death. The doctor expected them to recover, though they would require care. She almost wished it had been otherwise, and that they, and she too, might have just lain down to their rest in the churchyard—so cruel did life seem to her; so dreadful the recollection of that subdued voice of the hidden robber, smiting her with recognition.

All this time John was getting things ready for breakfast, with something of the handiness of a woman. Bessy half resented his officiousness in pressing Dr.

Preston to have a cup of tea, she did so want him to be gone and leave her alone with her thoughts. She did not know that all was done for love of her ; that the hard-featured, short-spoken John was thinking all the time how ill and miserable she looked, and trying with tender artifices to make it incumbent upon her sense of hospitality to share Dr. Preston's meal.

"I've seen as the cows is milked," said he, "yourn and all; and Atkinson's brought ours round fine. Whatten a marcy it were as she were sick just this very night ! Yon two chaps 'ud ha' made short work on't, if yo' hadna fetched us in ; and as it were, we had a sore tussle. One on 'em 'll bear the marks on't to his dying day, wunnot he, doctor ?"

"He'll barely have his leg well enough to stand his trial at York Assizes ; they're coming off in a fortnight from now."

"Ay, and that reminds me, Bessy, yo'll have to go witness before Justice Royds. Constables bade me tell yo', and gie yo' this summons. Dunnot be feared ; it will not be a long job, though I'm not saying as it 'll be a pleasant one. Yo'll have to answer questions as to how, and all about it ; and Jane" (his sister) "will come and stop wi' th' oud folks ; and I'll drive yo' in the shandry."

No one knew why Bessy's colour blenched, and her

eye clouded. No one knew how she apprehended lest she should have to say that Benjamin had been of the gang, if, indeed, in some way, the law had not followed on his heels quick enough to catch him.

But that trial was spared her ; she was warned by John to answer questions, and say no more than was necessary, for fear of making her story less clear ; and as she was known, by character, at least to Justice Royds and his clerk, they made the examination as little formidable as possible.

When all was over, and John was driving her back again, he expressed his rejoicing that there would be evidence enough to convict the men, without summoning Nathan and Hester to identify them. Bessy was so tired that she hardly understood what an escape it was ; how far greater than even her companion understood.

Jane Kirkby stayed with her for a week or more, and was an unspeakable comfort. Otherwise she sometimes thought she should have gone mad, with the face of her uncle always reminding her, in its stony expression of agony, of that fearful night. Her aunt was softer in her sorrow, as became one of her faithful and pious nature ; but it was easy to see how her heart bled inwardly. She recovered her strength sooner than her husband ; but as she recovered, the doctor

perceived the rapid approach of total blindness. Every day, nay, every hour of the day, that Bessy dared, without fear of exciting their suspicions of her knowledge, she told them, as she had anxiously told them at first, that only two men, and those perfect strangers, had been discovered as being concerned in the burglary. Her uncle would never have asked a question about it, even if she had withheld all information respecting the affair; but she noticed the quick, watching, waiting glance of his eye, whenever she returned from any person or place where she might have been supposed to gain intelligence if Benjamin were suspected or caught: and she hastened to relieve the old man's anxiety, by always telling all that she had heard; thankful that as the days passed on the danger she sickened to think of grew less and less.

Day by day, Bessy had ground for thinking that her aunt knew more than she had apprehended at first. There was something so very humble and touching in Hester's blind way of feeling about for her husband—stern, wobegone Nathan—and mutely striving to console him in the deep agony of which Bessy learnt, from this loving, piteous manner, that her aunt was conscious. Her aunt's face looked blankly up into his, tears slowly running down from her sightless eyes, while from time to time, when she thought herself unheard

by any save him, she would repeat such texts as she had heard at church in happier days, and which she thought, in her true, simple piety, might tend to console him. Yet, day by day, her aunt grew more and more sad.

Three or four days before assize-time, two summonses to attend the trial at York were sent to the old people. Neither Bessy, nor John, nor Jane, could understand this ; for their own notices had come long before, and they had been told that their evidence would be enough to convict.

But alas ! the fact was, that the lawyer employed to defend the prisoners had heard from them that there was a third person engaged, and had heard who that third person was ; and it was this advocate's business to diminish, if possible, the guilt of his clients, by proving that they were but tools in the hands of one who had, from his superior knowledge of the premises and the daily customs of the inhabitants, been the originator and planner of the whole affair. To do this it was necessary to have the evidence of the parents, who, as the prisoners had said, must have recognized the voice of the young man, their son. For no one knew that Bessy, too, could have borne witness to his having been present ; and, as it was supposed that Benjamin had escaped out of England, there was no exact betrayal of him on the part of his accomplices.

Wondering, bewildered, and weary, the old couple reached York, in company with John and Bessy, on the eve of the day of trial. Nathan was still so self-contained, that Bessy could never guess what had been passing in his mind. He was almost passive under his old wife's trembling caresses; he seemed hardly conscious of them, so rigid was his demeanour.

She, Bessy feared at times, was becoming childish; for she had evidently so great and anxious a love for her husband, that her memory seemed going in her endeavours to melt the stonyness of his aspect and manners; she appeared occasionally to have forgotten why he was so changed, in her piteous little attempts to bring him back to his former self.

"They'll, for sure, never torture them when they see what old folks they are!" cried Bessy, on the morning of the trial, a dim fear looming over her mind. "They'll never be so cruel, for sure!"

But "for sure" it was so. The barrister looked up at the judge, almost apologetically, as he saw how hoary-headed and woful an old man was put into the witness-box, when the defence came on, and Nathan Huntroyd was called on for his evidence.

"It is necessary, on behalf of my clients, my lord, that I should pursue a course which, for all other reasons, I deplore."

"Go on!" said the judge. "What is right and legal must be done." But, an old man himself, he covered his quivering mouth with his hand as Nathan, with grey, unmoved face, and solemn, hollow eyes, placing his two hands on each side of the witness-box, prepared to give his answers to questions, the nature of which he was beginning to foresee, but would not shrink from replying to truthfully; "the very stones" (as he said to himself, with a kind of dulled sense of the Eternal Justice) "rise up against such a sinner."

"Your name is Nathan Huntroyd, I believe?"

"It is."

"You live at Nab-end Farm?"

"I do."

"Do you remember the night of November the twelfth?"

"Yes."

"You were awakened that night by some noise, I believe. What was it?"

The old man's eyes fixed themselves upon his questioner, with the look of a creature brought to bay. That look the barrister never forgets. It will haunt him till his dying day.

"It was a throwing up of stones against our window."

"Did you hear it at first?"

"No."

"What awakened you then?"

"She did."

"And then you both heard the stones. Did you hear nothing else?"

A long pause. Then a low, clear "Yes."

"What?"

"Our Benjamin asking us for to let him in. She said as it were him, leastways."

"And you thought it was him, did you not?"

"I told her" (this time in a louder voice) "for to get to sleep, and not to be thinking that every drunken chap as passed by were our Benjamin, for that he were dead and gone."

"And she?"

"She said, as though she'd heerd our Benjamin, afore she were welly awake, axing for to be let in. But I bade her ne'er heed her dreams, but turn on her other side, and get to sleep again."

"And did she?"

A long pause,—judge, jury, bar, audience, all held their breath. At length Nathan said,

"No!"

"What did you do then? (My lord, I am compelled to ask these painful questions.)"

"I saw she wadna be quiet: she had allays thought

he would come back to us, like the Prodigal i' th' Gospels." (His voice choked a little, but he tried to make it steady, succeeded, and went on.) "She said, if I wadna get up she would; and just then I heerd a voice. I'm not quite mysel, gentlemen—I've been ill and i' bed, an' it makes me trembling-like. Some one said, 'Father, mother, I'm here, starving i' the cold—wunnot yo' get up and let me in?'"

"And that voice was?——"

"It were like our Benjamin's. I see whatten yo're driving at, sir, and I'll tell yo' truth, though it kills me to speak it. I dunnot say it were our Benjamin as spoke, mind yo'—I only say it were like——"

"That's all I want, my good fellow. And on the strength of that entreaty, spoken in your son's voice, you went down and opened the door to these two prisoners at the bar, and to a third man?"

Nathan nodded assent, and even that counsel was too merciful to force him to put more into words.

"Call Hester Huntroyd."

An old woman, with a face of which the eyes were evidently blind, with a sweet, gentle, careworn face, came into the witness-box, and meekly curtsied to the presence of those whom she had been taught to respect—a presence she could not see.

There was something in her humble, blind aspect, as

she stood waiting to have something done to her—what, her poor troubled mind hardly knew—that touched all who saw her, inexpressibly. Again the counsel apologized, but the judge could not reply in words ; his face was quivering all over, and the jury looked uneasily at the prisoners' counsel. That gentleman saw that he might go too far, and send their sympathies off on the other side ; but one or two questions he must ask. So, hastily recapitulating much that he had learned from Nathan, he said, " You believed it was your son's voice asking to be let in ?"

" Ay ! Our Benjamin came home, I'm sure ; choose where he is gone."

She turned her head about, as if listening for the voice of her child, in the hushed silence of the court.

" Yes ; he came home that night—and your husband went down to let him in ?"

" Well ! I believe he did. There was a great noise of folk down stair."

" And you heard your son Benjamin's voice among the others ?"

" Is it to do him harm, sir ?" asked she, her face growing more intelligent and intent on the business in hand.

" That is not my object in questioning you. I believe he has left England, so nothing you can say will

do him any harm. You heard your son's voice, I say?"

"Yes, sir. For sure, I did."

"And some men came up stairs into your room? What did they say?"

"They axed where Nathan kept his stocking."

"And you—did you tell them?"

"No, sir, for I knew Nathan would not like me to."

"What did you do then?"

A shade of reluctance came over her face, as if she began to perceive causes and consequences.

"I just screamed on Bessy—that's my niece, sir."

"And you heard some one shout out from the bottom of the stairs?"

She looked piteously at him, but did not answer.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I wish to call your particular attention to this fact: she acknowledges she heard some one shout—some third person, you observe—shout out to the two above. What did he say? That is the last question I shall trouble you with. What did the third person, left behind down stairs, say?"

Her face worked—her mouth opened two or three times as if to speak—she stretched out her arms imploringly; but no word came, and she fell back into the arms of those nearest to her. Nathan forced himself forward into the witness-box:

“My Lord Judge, a woman bore ye, as I reckon; it’s a cruel shame to serve a mother so. It wur my son, my only child, as called out for us t’ open door, and who shouted out for to bold th’ oud woman’s throat if she did na stop her noise, when hoo’d fain ha’ cried for her niece to help. And now yo’ve truth, and a’ th’ truth, and I’ll leave yo’ to th’ Judgment o’ God for th’ way yo’ve gotten at it.”

Before night the mother was stricken with paralysis, and lay on her death-bed. But the broken-hearted go Home, to be comforted of God.

THE END.

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